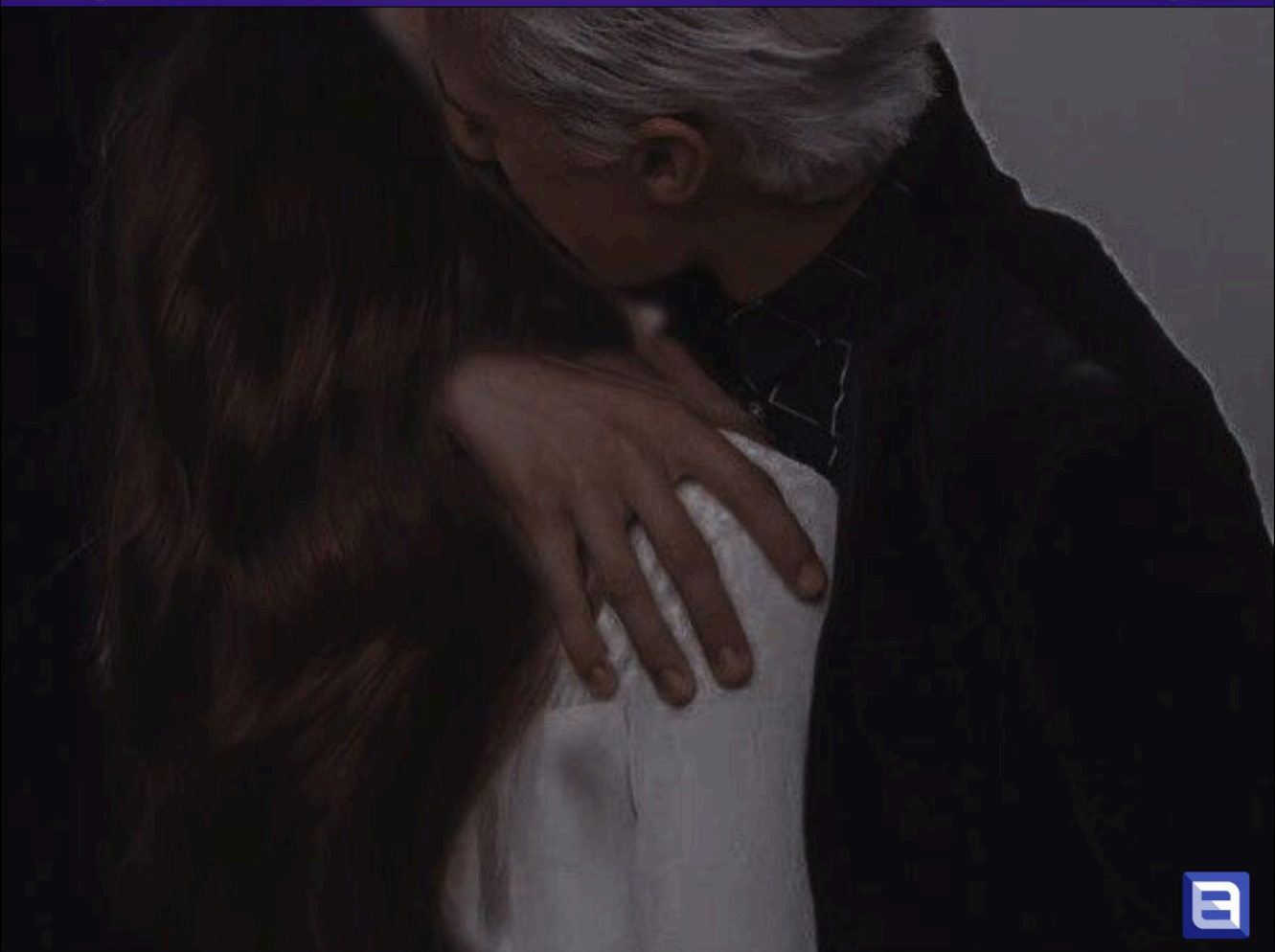


The Affair

snowblind12

Harry Potter

Complete



The Affair

snowblind12

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Summary

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Approaching her seven year anniversary, Hermione feels less than content. Enter Draco Malfoy. A story of betrayal, forgiveness and love. Light D/s and BDSM. HG/DM LissaDream is co-writer to later chapters. Complete.

Chapter 1

As I was writing my most recent chapter of A Witch's Tale, the idea of this story came to mind. I won't say this is in any way related to A Witch's Tale, but I will say that the dominant Theo Hermione remembers is very much the same dominant Theo from A Witch's Tale.

This story is based off the wonderful work and imagination of JK Rowling. The Harry Potter universe belongs to her.

Co-written with LissaDream

BETA — RaynePhoenix2

She gasped as he grabbed her and bent her forward, ripping her panties with impatience. She let out a squeal before her mouth was suddenly gagged.

"Don't speak, Granger," the blond wizard commanded. "Don't make a sound." Instantly, he was inside her... pounding, claiming, owning, taking. It had been over a week and he was ravenous for her. She felt the gag tighten, pulling her head back, like the reins on a horse, as he thrust into her from behind. It was desperate and urgent, almost vicious with carnal need. Only one coherent thought came to her mind; *heaven*.

Four Months Earlier

Hermione was setting the table when Theo entered the apartment. He walked over to her and tapped his lips against her cheek before patting her behind and heading to their bedroom to get changed. Hermione sighed as she watched his retreating form. She loved her husband. He was good to her and she didn't want for anything... except maybe the passion that had once consumed them. Before they had married, their sex life was perfect, and it stayed that way the first couple of years of their marriage. Now, however, two weeks away from their seven-year anniversary, Hermione felt unfulfilled. Every day was predictable. Every sexual encounter was practically scripted — or at least felt that way. First, they would kiss, then he would go down on her until she came. Next, he would roll onto his back where she would go down on him before mounting him, at which time she would ride him to his completion and occasionally, if she was lucky, a second orgasm for herself. Although, when that happened, it was when she closed her eyes and her imagination took her to a far-away place.

The days were always the same. Breakfast at seven-forty-five before she left for work at eight-fifteen, followed by his departure at eight-forty-five. She got home at four-thirty and would be setting the table when he arrived via floo at six. Dinner at six-thirty, television until ten and then to bed. Sex was on Saturday nights and occasionally on Fridays, if they went out and had been drinking. They had fallen into this dreadfully boring existence and Hermione didn't think she could take it anymore.

She was putting linguine with shrimp on the table when he pulled his chair out and took his seat. She sat across from him and they ate in their usual, comfortable silence. Twirling her pasta into the spoon, she watched her wizard and tried to see the same man she adored seven years ago. His dark hair was now cut short, but he still had the same beautiful blue eyes. She felt her heart melt a little when he looked up at her and caught her staring. He flashed her the adorable grin that always made her heart race. She could feel the pink tinge spread across her cheeks as her thoughts wandered.

“What?” he asked, still grinning.

Hermione shrugged it off as she looked back at her plate and forked a shrimp. “Oh nothing. Just reminiscing with thoughts of us when we first started dating.” She popped the shrimp into her mouth and offered a small smile as she chewed.

“That was a good time, wasn’t it?” he asked with a wide smile. “I was in love with you after only one date.”

She swallowed and remembered that time in her life. It was all so bright and promising back then — her career and her personal life. She had fallen for him instantly. She grinned playfully. “It was that fast for me as well. It really took me by surprise.” She watched him as he continued eating. “Remember how we couldn’t keep our hands off each other?”

He laughed as he wiped his mouth. “It’s a wonder we ever left the house.”

Hermione decided to drop a hint. “I seem to remember you had a Dominant side to you back then.” He didn’t respond more than a wagging of his brows before taking another bite of his dinner.

Hermione internally felt deflated. Why had it all changed? He gradually went from being sexually Dominant and insatiable to being a boring, predictable robot in the bedroom. Had she changed? Had she done something wrong? Had he become bored with her? She knew he loved her, but what had brought on the change? Could he be sleeping with someone else?

Before she could stop herself, the words spilled out. “Maybe that Dominant side of you wants to come out and play?”

“Oh, kitten. Do you miss that? I can be that way... if you want me to.” He put down his fork and was looking at her curiously, like he was studying her.

She suddenly felt very self-conscious. “Well I mean if you want to. Like I said, I was just reminiscing... just remembering.”

He sipped his water and continued watching her. “If that’s what you want, kitten, I can do that. I just... I don’t know. I guess I lost that desire after I married you. It didn’t feel quite right to treat my *wife* that way. It felt, disrespectful somehow and I guess I lost my taste for it.”

Hermione swallowed. *Oh!* That explained it. She had to think about that. “I guess I never really felt like you were disrespecting me because it was pretend. It’s not like you were *really* punishing me or hurting me.” She shrugged. “Forget I mentioned it. Like I said, I was just remembering.” She started eating again but could feel his eyes on her. She was feeling uncomfortable and foolish for bringing it up and hoped he would just drop it. Better yet, maybe he would forget she had even mentioned it. He had outgrown it and she needed to put

such foolish notions out of her mind. Her internal chastisement was silenced by the soft and deliberate words spoken from across the table.

“Mrs. Nott. Put down your fork and look at me.”

Hermione felt her heart race at the sound of her long-lost Dominant. She did as she was told and looked up at him tentatively; her stomach doing flips for the first time in years. His expression was what she remembered; sexy and commanding with piercing blue eyes that demanded her compliance. Excitement was racing through her. This was it! Finally, the routine would be broken and their sex life would be exciting again!

Suddenly, his face broke into a grin and then he couldn't stop laughing. She smiled at him as she felt her insides deflate more than just a little bit. “Sorry kitten. I'm sorry. I shouldn't laugh, but it just seems so silly me treating you like that. You don't really want that... do you?”

“No, no... of course not! We were young and silly back then.” She forced her smile to appear genuine and tried desperately to look as amused as he was.

Theo beamed at her. “I love you so much, kitten, and I think this is the best linguine with shrimp you've ever made!” He started eating again and the conversation came to a stop.

Hermione had lost her appetite and smiled softly at him as she watched him eat. She felt ill. Everything had changed so much over the years. He used to be so attentive to her. He used to insist she finish her dinner and worry that she didn't get enough rest. He kept tabs on her daily habits and insisted on healthy choices. Most of all, he couldn't keep his hands off her and she loved that he wanted to Dominate her sexually. She had felt like she was the center of his world! But now? Now she just felt like she was his companion to eat with, watch TV with, and share the weekly orgasm.

After swallowing his last bite, he helped her clear the table and load the Muggle dishwasher. Then he headed into the living room and turned on the TV to watch one of the many shows that he now loved. Hermione wished she had never introduced him to Muggle television. The Muggle lifestyle had invaded the wizarding world and that wasn't necessarily a good thing. As the years had passed, Hermione was surprised she found herself siding with purebloods about some of the influences from the rest of the world.

“I'm going to take my shower,” she announced, trying to keep the frustration out of her voice. He nodded and smiled at her in acknowledgment as she headed to the bathroom. She turned on the water and stepped under the warm jets, letting the tears fall down her cheeks. After a moment, she wiped them away and scolded herself. She had no business crying about this. Theo was a wonderful husband and she lived a good life. She had a husband who loved her, and they had a nice home. They had dear friends whom they both loved. She was being beyond childish crying because her husband didn't want to be Dominant in the bedroom. She felt pathetic. She scrubbed her skin and washed her hair and forced herself to put Dominant Theo out of her mind and to acknowledge she had nothing to be upset about.

When she came out of the shower, Hermione was stunned to find Theo standing in the bathroom. He looked at her adoringly as she grabbed her towel and wrapped it around herself. “You know I love you more than anything in this world, right?”

She smiled up at him. “And I love you the same, Theo. You are my world.”

He gently pulled her to him and kissed her while sliding the towel off her. Hermione was shocked. It was Tuesday! He picked her up and carried her bridal style into the bedroom where he laid her on her back before kissing down her body, bringing her to orgasm orally. He then rolled onto his back where she went down on him before mounting him and riding him to his completion.

Chapter 2

Beta — RaynePhoenix2

Thanks for reading and reviewing!

Hermione's week was crazy. She had a new client whose complaint was against Theo's best friend, Draco Malfoy. Well, not him personally but his company; Malfoy Enterprises. Hermione was friends with Draco as well, but there had always been a slight undercurrent of tension between them. It was a left-over by-product of their youth, and while Hermione liked the adult Draco Malfoy very much, there was something that was always simmering beneath the surface when she was with him. Something she couldn't *quite* put her finger on. Over recent years, she and Theo had seen less of Draco. He traveled a lot for his company and maintained an active social life. He had also recently divorced. Hermione felt a smattering of guilt that she and Theo had not had Draco over for dinner since the divorce had been finalized, and now she felt even worse that her newest case was going to likely cause friction between herself and the blond.

Hermione had opened her own business four years ago and to say it was thriving would be a gross understatement. She had established herself as a problem solver due to her involvement with bringing down Voldemort and her work to protect minority magical beings. Thanks to her, merpeople, house elves, centaurs, and other magical beings were all represented at the ministry and had a voice. Her name was so well known that she had no need to advertise, and those who wanted her help had to submit an application. She only took on cases of those who had a problem or a cause she deemed worthy. She charged on a sliding scale and only took in payment what her clients could afford. She had plenty money and worked more for the greater good than for the cash it brought in. If her client was wealthy, she took a fee. If her client was struggling financially, however, she would take the case for free.

Hermione sat at her desk and pondered her new client. Moxie Graggot applied for the job of Head Accountant at Malfoy Enterprises and claims she was discriminated against because she was a female goblin. Her cousin, Bodrid Graggot was hired despite having six years less experience than her. While there were no laws that protected female goblins against discrimination (at least not yet) Hermione felt the cause was worth the battle. She wondered if Draco was even aware of what had transpired with this goblin. Malfoy Enterprises was a huge company and Draco had an Employee Resources department that handled the hiring most of the time.

"I can't promise you I'll be able to get you the job you clearly deserve, but I promise that if what you say is true, Malfoy Enterprises is in for some serious negative publicity. What happened to you will not go unnoticed."

Moxie didn't smile at Hermione, for Goblins never smiled, but she looked at Hermione with respect and nodded in appreciation of Hermione's promise.

After Moxie left, Hermione floo'd to Malfoy Enterprises' main office in London. She was greeted with smiles and friendly nods of hello as she walked through the ground floor, marbled lobby. She was known and liked in the wizarding world, and it was also common knowledge within Malfoy Enterprises that her husband was best friends with Draco Malfoy.

Hermione hated that she was visiting today, not as an ally to Malfoy Enterprises (or ME as she called it), but as a voice against their prejudiced hiring practices that Hermione ventured to guess spread far beyond one female goblin being unfairly passed over. There were surely countless other minority magical beings who had been treated in a similar fashion.

She walked into the office of the head of Employee Resources and was greeted by an older, handsome wizard. He held out his hand and smiled warmly at her. "George Flinton at your service."

She shook his hand and smiled back. "Hermione Nott, Mr. Flinton. Pleasure." He motioned to the chair facing his desk as he sat in his large comfortable seat behind it. As soon as her rear end hit the surface of her chair, Hermione got to the point. "Mr. Flinton, I'm visiting on behalf of my new client, Moxie Graggot. Perhaps you remember her?"

The smile faded from genuine to seemingly forced on George Flinton's face. "Yes, yes. I do remember her. I liked her and am sorry she wasn't the right fit for Malfoy Enterprises."

Hermione leaned toward his desk and asked with a genuine look of curiosity. "In what way was she not a fit, Mr. Flinton?"

George shifted in his seat. "Well, I'm really not at liberty to discuss the hiring practices of Malfoy Enterprises. I'm sure you understand."

Hermione nodded in concession. "Well, I certainly understand that a qualified female goblin with vast experience in accounting management was passed over for a male goblin with significant less experience." She paused. "Unless, of course, my facts are wrong?"

"Well, once again, I'm really not at liberty to discuss this... but I will say that there are many reasons we choose to hire or not hire an applicant, and while experience certainly is a huge piece of it, there are other factors at play as well."

"What kind of factors?"

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Nott. I really can't be of further assistance in this matter." His expression had lost its friendly demeanor, and his manner was dismissive. He stood and gestured towards the door for her to leave.

Hermione rose to her feet and smiled. "Well, thank you for your time. I had hoped you would be able to give me a justifiable reason that I could bring back to my client. That way, this could all have been resolved this morning. But, I see we are going to have to do this the hard way." She started to walk towards the door and then turned back towards him. "Perhaps you are familiar with Rita Skeeter? Your next visit will likely be from her as I am meeting her for coffee this morning. I'm sure she'll be most interested and sympathetic towards Moxie's situation."

The color drained from George Flinton's face. "Mrs. Nott, please. There is no reason to get the Daily Prophet involved in this. Legally, we are in our right to hire whomever we choose for whatever reason we choose."

Hermione smiled. “Yes, I’m aware. But you should be aware that while discrimination laws only apply to human witches and wizards, it is my intention to expand those laws to include all magical beings. I’m thinking this particular case will be the platform on which I base my argument. I have a feeling you and I are going to be seeing a lot more of each other, Mr. Flinton.”

As Hermione left, she heard the distinct sound of the floo being activated in Mr. Flinton’s office. Hermione imagined he was probably off to see his superior or perhaps Draco himself at this very minute.

Just as Hermione was about to walk out the front door of Malfoy Enterprises, the distinctive voice of Draco Malfoy echoed behind her. “Really, Granger? They say girls pick on boys when they like them. Something you’re trying to tell me?” His tone and words were playful. He was probably trying to mask the genuine concern behind it.

Hermione stopped walking and turned back to face him. She felt a flush come over her and a slight speeding up of her heart at the sight of him. Draco Malfoy looked good. In fact, he looked better than she had ever seen him. Being divorced clearly agreed with him. He was wearing a slim fitting, Muggle designer suit. The charcoal grey brought out his steel eyes. His complexion had a bit of color, like he had gotten a little sun recently, and his hair was the same silky, white-blond that always made her want to run her fingers through it. He had a slight five o’clock shadow despite it only being 9:30 am.

He was grinning at her and she offered a small smile in return. They walked towards each other and Hermione allowed him to give her a kiss on the cheek.

“I haven’t been Granger for a long time, Mr. Malfoy. Perhaps you remember attending my wedding? You *were* best man if memory serves.” She smirked up at him.

His grin morphed into a full blown, cheeky smile as he shook his head. “You’ll always be Granger to me, Granger. I just don’t see you as a Nott... never have.”

His eyes were on hers and Hermione felt a flutter in her belly. A flutter she had been missing for about five years — outside of the teasing five seconds at the dinner table the night before. Five seconds of hope before her husband had started laughing, leaving it plain to Hermione *that* part of her marriage was truly over. Which reminded her, she *was* married. She took a step back from the blond but kept her eyes on his.

Draco’s gaze narrowed slightly. “So, what gives, Granger?”

Her face falling, she took a breath and said what her purpose was. “Simply put, my client feels she was unfairly passed over for a job she was perfectly qualified for.”

The superior look she had seen countless times before appeared on his face. “A goblin client, you mean. You do know that discrimination laws don’t apply to goblins? And while I’m not condoning the practice, and will look into this personally, we haven’t broken any laws or done anything that warrants getting the papers involved.”

Crossing her arms, she pressed him, “If you’ve truly done nothing wrong, and your conscience is clear, then why won’t Mr. Flinton answer my questions?”

His focus traveled from her eyes to her mouth and back again. “Why didn’t you just come to see me in the first place? Why bother with George? You’re a smart witch — you had to

realize he wouldn't answer your questions."

"I guess I foolishly assumed the head of Employee Resources would be the first person I should speak with for a *human resources* issue, Draco" she shot back. They stared at each other for a minute before she shrugged and added, "But yes, I was working my way up to you. I wasn't going to leave you out," she added teasingly.

"Well, no time like the present," he responded with a daring tone as he gestured towards the lift. She met his silver eyes once again to see a touch of excitement in them. She felt a slight stirring in her gut, much like only moments before.

After contemplating for a minute, she took the bait. "Sure. Why not?" There was no question, she knew it was bait, but she was a Gryffindor and she felt like a hardy debate was just what she needed. She pretended to herself that it was no more than that.

Draco followed her onto the elevator and when the doors closed, she noticed he was standing right next to her. Neither spoke as the elevator began to move. He was so close, she could hear his breathing and it caused that same damn fluttering in her gut, only this time, it was matched with a rush of heat that was creeping over her skin. She forced herself to focus on the dial's needle which turned to the corresponding floor number as they ascended to the penthouse office. She took a calming inhalation and blew it out slowly as her reason began to take hold. *What is wrong with you? Get a grip!* She had never reacted this way towards Malfoy... or towards any wizard — other than Theo, that was. That had been a long time ago, though.

Draco seemed to sense her uneasiness. "You okay? You seem a bit... flushed."

"Just a bit claustrophobic," she replied. Thankfully, the doors opened and he gestured her towards his office. He led her down a long hall to a set of double doors. She noticed there was no sign with his name anywhere and she quickly guessed that anyone who made it to this part of the building knew who they were coming to see.

Draco's office was huge. The building didn't look tall from the outside, but the penthouse office had glass walls with fabulous views of London. It was obviously charmed. Two of the four walls were floor to ceiling glass. His desk was contemporary, as was the sectional furniture, but scattered rugs were clearly antique Persian. He unbuttoned and removed his jacket, leaving him in a light-blue, button-down shirt and charcoal-grey suit pants. Hermione could easily see he had a nice build. He must have been working out since the divorce.

There were pictures on his desk and Hermione was surprised to see one was a picture of him with his ex-wife, Astoria. He had a picture of his mother, Narcissa, as well.

Draco observed the Gryffindor as she glanced around his office, not caring if she could feel his eyes on her. She was wearing a navy-blue pencil skirt that was fitted to just above her knees and a grey silk blouse. She'd made a habit of dressing better the past couple of years. She had found that executives in the private industry, as well as those within the ministry, took her more seriously when she dressed the part, and Muggle attire was becoming more fashionable.

Draco poured them each a cup of tea and gestured towards the sectional. Hermione took a seat in the spot he indicated and he sat next to her, handing her the cup and saucer.

She took a deep swallow of the delicious blend and let out a small sigh when it calmed her. She offered him a small smile as she licked the moisture on her bottom lip. She didn't miss the slight heat in his gaze as it moved from her mouth to her eyes and back again. His desire for her was undeniable, and in that moment, Hermione realized she was having the same effect on him that he was having on her.

Warning bells went off in her head. It was one thing if it was only her feeling it but if he was getting the same vibe, there would only be trouble. She needed to put a stop to this. Putting her cup down, she whispered, "I think I should leave."

His strong hand grabbed her forearm. "Stay." It was a soft but commanding tone and when she turned to him, it was to find him looking at her with an intensity she had never seen on his face. She blinked, taken in surprise by his demeanor. It made her blush and she saw the corners of his mouth turn up slightly into a very slight smile. It was obvious he knew how he was affecting her. She felt confused and didn't understand what was happening or why she was reacting this way. She hadn't seen him in a few months. Their relationship had always had a slight tension, but she had never taken it for sexual.

When she had seen him in the past, Astoria was usually with him. His treatment of his wife had always been gentle and patient in both the way he spoke to her and treated her. Hermione had always thought Astoria seemed fragile and there had been rumors about her mental health. Draco always seemed so attentive and understanding towards her, though. He was doting and kind to his wife.

The way he was speaking and looking at Hermione right now, however? This was a side of Draco she had never witnessed before. Not towards Astoria and certainly not towards herself. Regardless, she couldn't deny what was happening and it needed to stop.

She stood up. "I need to leave. You know I do. This... this isn't... I should go."

As she was walking away, Draco rose and spoke in a commanding voice that made her knees go weak. "Granger, stop walking and listen, just listen. Please."

It was the 'please' that did it. She halted her steps but refused to turn and look at him.

"I've known you most of your life. I guess you could say I've made a habit of studying you. I've watched you much closer than you realize, and I know you... so much more than you are aware." He slowly stalked up behind her so that he was whispering in her ear. "Your relationship with Theo? The little things... waiting for him to start eating before you, purposely ignoring the food on your plate willing him to insist you eat... like he used to. The slight disappointment in your eyes when he doesn't. I remember when you first started dating him; your dynamic was very different from how it is now. Theo used to like to play the Dominant occasionally. I know, because we used to talk about it. But he's changed, hasn't he? You aren't happy and you haven't been for years. He hasn't been taking care of you."

Hermione was stunned. Her heart was pounding. How did he know all this? His words had completely taken her by surprise and she was utterly frozen with her disbelief.

Still standing close behind her, he gently stroked her arms with his fingertips. "I know what you need. You won't be truly happy until that desire inside of you is met. You need a Dominant man in your life. I can fill that void."

It took her a second to compose her thoughts. At first, she almost laughed, but then she was furious. *How dare he!* Turning back towards him, she snapped, “Who the hell are *you* to presume to know what I want or what I need? You are making wild assumptions! Yes, Theo used to be different, but he’s my husband and I *love* him. And you! You should not be talking to me like this! I’m your best friend’s *wife!*” She stepped back from him realizing just how close their faces were. “What, you’re divorced so you’re going to move in on a married witch? What is wrong with you?” If her voice hadn’t clued him in to her fury, her eyes certainly had.

But Draco would have been surprised if she had reacted differently. His expression remained calm and controlled, as did his voice and his tone. “You’re only getting angry because deep down you know I’m right.” He stepped towards her, closing the distance she had just created. “What exactly is it you are you afraid of? What do you *really* have to lose?”

Hermione laughed without humor. “Are you insane? Is this a joke? What do I have to lose? How about my husband, my life, my home?!”

“There’s no reason you have to lose any of those things. It’s a simple arrangement I’m offering. I want you and I want you to submit to me. I’ve wanted this for years. But, I *don’t* want to marry you. I don’t want to live with you. I simply want to Dominate you and yes, I want to *fuck* you. I want to fuck you until you beg for mercy. But you can continue to live your life with Theo. I don’t want to hurt him; he’s my best friend. As a matter of fact, I’m helping him right now. I’m offering to fill the void in your otherwise perfect little world. You’ll be so much happier, and your life will be that much more perfect. In turn — his life will be perfect as well.”

At that point, Hermione truly did start laughing. “You’re completely delusional, Malfoy. Certifiable! I’m leaving.”

As Hermione stalked out the door of his office, she heard him say, “Think about it, Granger. Just think about it.”

Hermione couldn’t get out of Malfoy Enterprises fast enough. Draco Malfoy was an absolute idiot if he thought she was in any way interested in a sexual relationship with him, much less letting him Dominate her! Sure, the thought was appealing. And sure, she practically creamed herself when he said he wanted to fuck her, but to act on it would be beyond reckless. Even admitting it to anyone other than herself would essentially be adultery.

As she marched down the street she could feel her magic spiking within herself and she knew she needed to focus it on something. As she rounded the corner, she waved her wand at a trash can and shot a *Reducto*, causing it to explode, debris landing all around her.

The strange thing was she felt aroused as well. Very aroused. She decided to pay her husband a visit and prove just how *not* submissive she was. She could take control and she would enjoy it, damn it!

Theo was currently working in the wizarding library. He was helping the library adapt some Muggle technology that would cut down on the over abundance of paper books, magazines, and newspapers. It had gotten so bad, that finding what one was looking for was becoming impossible. The librarian had just kept charming more rooms to hold the extra volumes of everything over the years, but Theo had convinced the ministry, as well as the

head librarian, that it was time to modernize. He had taken the elderly librarian to the Muggle library — The London Library in St. James Square. He had shown the man the technology that was available and the poor wizard had nearly keeled over in shock. After some time to come around to it, they had all had agreed it was a necessary evil. Theo had been working on this project for a few months.

Hermione was still fuming as she entered the library in search of her husband. After asking around, she found him hidden in a room buried up to his neck in newspapers he was scanning for digital storage.

He looked up in stunned surprise. “Hermione, are you alright?” He rushed over to her upon seeing her. She had never visited him at work before and his panicked expression made her heart melt just a touch.

She quickly reassured him everything was fine as she shut and locked the door behind her. His look had morphed from shock to confusion. “Hermione, what are you doing? Why are you locking the door?”

She turned back to him, desire written all over her face. Theo swallowed and actually took a step back. “What’s this about?”

“Please. Don’t talk. Just go with it, okay?”

He gave her a small nod and she lunged at him. He landed on his back and on the table behind him, causing newspapers to scatter. She clambered on top of him, making quick work of undoing his buckle. She had his cock in her hands quickly and was slightly disappointed he wasn’t aroused. It was no matter, though, she was able to use her mouth to get him to the desired state.

Pulling back from him, she whispered. “Theo, I want you to fuck me. Fuck me hard and fast. Don’t make love to me, take me.”

Theo stared at her for a millisecond and then the gears kicked in. He rolled off the table and grabbed her, forcing her chest and face down flat against the newspaper ridden surface. He pulled her skirt up and yanked down her knickers before sliding into her. He did as she demanded and fucked her furiously, his bollocks making a slapping sound with each thrust. He reached around and stimulated her with his fingers, quickly bringing her to completion before reaching his own.

Collapsing onto her back, he kissed her neck and took a moment to catch his breath. After regaining his composure, he pushed away from her and slowly stood, readjusting himself and fastening his trousers. Hermione pushed herself to stand and smoothed down her skirt.

When she turned back towards him, his look was not one of a man who was pleased to have been demanded sex from his wife. Instead, his expression was frustrated — angry even. “You want to tell me what the hell that was all about?”

Chapter 3

Co-written with LissaDream

Beta — RaynePhoenix2

Thanks for reading and reviewing!

“You want to tell me what the hell that was all about?”

He was obviously angry, which was very rare for Theo. Hermione swallowed before unleashing her frustration. “You’re upset with me? You’re mad because I wanted you? Because I desired my *husband*?”

His jaw fell, suddenly realizing how he was coming across. “No, you know what I mean. I’m not angry, I’m concerned. I don’t mean to react so poorly, but in the seven years we’ve been married, you’ve *never* shown up at my work and demanded sex, and you were so aggressive.” He sighed. ‘Can you blame me for being taken by surprise?’ He stepped towards her and pulled her into his arms. His voice was soft. “Just tell me, kitten. What brought this on?”

Feeling safe in his arms, her anger and frustration began to melt away. Hermione almost found herself telling him the truth. All of it. What she wanted from him as well as Malfoy’s indecent proposal. But something made her stop. She didn’t think she was prepared to handle the fallout from the shit storm that would follow. Plus, she didn’t want to make him feel like he had to be something he didn’t want to be.

“I just,” she swallowed and continued. “I’ve had a stressful morning. I missed you and I needed you, and... I’m sorry. It was inappropriate and unfair. I’ll go.” She pulled away and started to walk towards the door.

Theo quickly stepped over and pulled her back into his arms. He spoke reassuringly. “It’s okay... you just took me completely off guard and you were so... desperate and needy.”

Hermione pushed back from her husband, concealing the fury that was reigniting under the surface. *Did he really just call me desperate and needy? I wouldn’t be desperate and needy if you hadn’t changed!* Plastering a big smile on her face, she avoided an argument with false reassurances. “I’m fine. I’m gonna go. I’ll fix shepherd’s pie for dinner, I know it’s your favorite.”

Theo smiled. “Looking forward to it, kitten.” He cocked his head and asked with genuine concern, “You sure you’re okay?”

“Yep, gotta go. Love ya.” With that, she dashed out of the small room and made her way quickly through the library. She Apparated back to her office. “Close the floo and lock the door, Lizzy. I need some time to myself,” she snapped at her assistant as she stormed into her office and slammed the door.

She collapsed onto her chair and leaned back, closing her eyes, willing herself to calm down. In truth, she was more hurt than angry. *Am I desperate and needy?* She felt deflated and lost. *What is wrong with me and how obvious is my desire if Malfoy could see it?* She scolded herself. *You need to put this nonsense behind you and stop acting like a child. Theo Nott is a good man and he loves you. So what if your sex life isn't as exciting as you want? Sex isn't that important. Stop thinking about it!*

She took a deep breath. Moxie... she needed to be thinking about Moxie. Her questions weren't answered at Malfoy Enterprises and she had no desire to be alone with Malfoy again, so she would proceed with her plans to meet with Rita Skeeter. She and Rita were not, and never would be, friends. However, they both realized the other was a valuable resource and they developed a 'quid pro quo' type relationship. She would invite Rita to lunch and then throw herself into her work. When she wasn't at work, she would focus on being a good wife to Theo. She needed to put all this nonsense behind her.

Hermione owed Rita inviting her to lunch but Rita wasn't available and suggested lunch the following day. Hermione accepted and started looking over her notes. There was a knock at her door. "Hermione? Another owl has arrived for you. It looks like it's from Theo."

"You can come in, Lizzy." Lizzy had been Hermione's assistant just over a year and she was very fond of the older witch. As Lizzy handed Hermione the note, Hermione smiled up at her. "I'm sorry I was in such a state and snapped at you when I came in."

Lizzy smiled at Hermione warmly, "You have nothing to apologize for. I've never worked for anyone who treated me as well as you do. How about I make you a cup of tea?"

"That would be wonderful. Thank you."

When Lizzy left to get the tea, Hermione opened the note. "I hope you don't mind, but I invited Draco to join us for dinner tonight. I'll explain when I see you. I told him 6:30. Love you, Theo." Hermione balled the note up in her fist and threw it at the wall.

"Oh dear. Perhaps you need something stronger than tea?" Lizzie was standing in the doorway with the tea tray.

Hermione sighed. "No, Lizzy. Tea is perfect. Please come sit and have a cup with me."

Lizzy walked over and placed the tray on Hermione's desk where she started preparing their cups. "You know Hermione, I'm here if you ever want someone to talk to. I'm an old witch with a lot of mistakes in my past. I've learned a lot of lessons over the years and I have plenty advice to give should you ever be in need. I'm also a good listener."

Hermione laughed. "You? Make a mistake? I don't believe it's possible. You're simply perfect, Lizzy."

Lizzy handed Hermione her cup and then sat in the chair across from her, stirring her own. "Oh no, my dear. I've made *plenty* mistakes. Too many mistakes... I assure you."

Hermione sipped her tea studying the older witch. After a moment she sighed. "Well, I seem to be a little less content with my marriage the past few years and I need to snap out of it. I mean, Theo is a wonderful husband. He treats me well and I want for nothing. I'm angry with myself for even thinking I'm not a hundred percent happy!"

Lizzy seemed to contemplate for a minute. “Hermione, no marriage is perfect, and I have yet to meet *anyone* who is a hundred percent happy... married or not! However, in my experience, which is vast considering I’m on my third marriage, you can’t ignore your feelings. When you try to sweep things under the rug, they cause a ripple that will trip you up later and cause more damage than if you just dealt with them in the beginning.”

Hermione was shocked. “You’re on your third marriage?”

Lizzy smiled and nodded. “I married very young the first time and it only lasted a couple years. My second husband died in the war. I married a third time five years ago.” She sipped her tea.

Hermione put down her cup and leaned forward. “I’m so sorry about your second husband. Please don’t answer if you don’t want to, but... what happened?”

Lizzy smiled and stared out the picture window. “He was at the wrong place at the wrong time. He was having dinner with some Muggle-born friends and they were attacked by Death Eaters.”

“Oh, Lizzy. I’m so sorry. That’s just... terrible.” Hermione picked up her cup and took a sip thinking back on the loved ones and friends she had lost because of Voldemort and his Death Eaters.

Lizzy smiled at her. “So... you see, I have lots of experience when it comes to husbands. And don’t bother telling yourself that you’re wrong to question your marriage or your happiness. You have one life and that’s it.” She paused and continued. “That doesn’t mean you should be reckless, but if there is something missing in your life or your marriage, and if you can put your finger on what is causing your discontent, then you need to face it and address it... *before* it festers and becomes a bigger problem.”

Hermione sighed. “Yeah, I know you’re right. I started to address it with him last night but wasn’t as direct as perhaps I should have been. I sort of skirted around it. But, he dismissed it and it became clear to me that he didn’t feel like I did and if I demanded what I wanted, then he would be unhappy. I feel like either way, one of us will be unfulfilled.”

Lizzy contemplated for a minute. “Well, communication is key. He needs to know how you feel so that he can make his choice.”

Hermione shook her head. “No, no. I don’t want it to go that far. He’s a good man and he’ll choose to give in to what I want and then he’ll be unsatisfied. I couldn’t bear that!”

“So instead, you’ll be the unhappy one?”

Hermione sighed. “It’s not like I’m completely miserable!”

“Well, my dear. We’ve just run a circle right back to the original problem.”

Hermione laughed. “I know logically that what you are saying is correct. I guess I just need to think about it. Maybe there’s a middle ground somewhere in all this.”

Lizzy smiled. “Now that, my dear, is being wise beyond your years.”

Wednesday Evening

Hermione was setting the table when Theo arrived home at six. Just like the night before, he kissed her on the cheek. "Smells good, kitten." After patting her on the behind, he headed to their bedroom to change clothes. Hermione couldn't help the heavy exhale of discontent that escaped her lips.

When he came back out to the kitchen, Hermione asked her husband, "So, how did you end up inviting Draco to dinner?"

He looked up sheepishly. "Oh, you don't mind, do you? I was in Diagon Alley for lunch and ran into him. He mentioned wanting to get together and I suggested tonight. You said you were making shepherd's pie and you know he loves that almost as much as I do. Besides, you always make enough to feed an army."

Hermione forced a smile. "No, I don't mind. Did he mention I saw him this morning?"

"Yeah, he said you have a client that has a complaint against ME. He said he wanted to talk to you about it, but you had to leave." His look became curious. "Was that before you visited me?"

Hermione thought fast. "Well, not directly before. I ran a couple errands before coming to the library," she lied.

Just then, there was a knock at the door. Theo opened it while Hermione headed back into the kitchen. She could hear the wizards talking and Theo opening a bottle of wine. She squared her shoulders and took a deep breath before walking into the living room.

Her mouth went dry at the sight of Draco. He was wearing faded Levi's, a grey shirt, and a black sports jacket. She swallowed and pretended everything was normal by walking over and giving him a hug hello. He hugged her back and as she pulled away, his hand traced down the bare skin on her arm. She shivered and turned quickly towards Theo to find he had his back to them and was pouring the wine. She looked back at Draco who was staring at her with a slight grin.

Draco winked at her and she gave him an evil glare. "It's a little cold in here. Think I'll grab my sweater."

When she walked back into the living room, the wizards were in another Quidditch discussion. She rolled her eyes and headed into the kitchen to check dinner.

She was standing at the sink, looking out the window when she felt him approach behind her. He was close, very close and she couldn't help the chills sweeping through her, despite the sweater she had just put on.

"You've been thinking about it, haven't you, pet?" he whispered.

Hermione was startled by his audacity to be in such close proximity to her and stepped to the side and away from his towering form. She turned to him and whispered angrily, "I'm not your pet!"

He didn't smile. His look was intense, and his demeanor was that of man with total confidence. His words were simple. "Maybe not, but you could be." His steely gaze didn't move from hers and she felt her knees go slightly weak.

Hermione swallowed. She couldn't help the warmth creeping up her neck to her cheeks and knew she was blushing. She could feel her heart begin to pound and her breathing picked up. Draco just watched her, his gaze unchanging. He said quietly, but definitively, "Tonight, you will eat everything on your plate. You will drink no more than two glasses of wine. You will smile and be engaging. If you disobey, you will be punished."

Hermione glared at him and was about to give him a piece of her mind when Theo walked in. "Hey you two!"

Draco's whole demeanor changed. His posture relaxed, and he smiled widely at his best friend. "I was just telling Hermione here how good dinner smells," he fibbed quite convincingly.

Hermione's mind was reeling. She couldn't deny the effect Draco had on her, or more accurately, the effect his *Dominance* had on her. She found herself compelled to obey him... but knew if she did, she would be crossing a line. She would be accepting his control of her, even if it was only for the evening. On the other hand, it would be a fairly innocent exchange, wouldn't it? It's not like she was having sex with him. It's not like it was a point of no return.

She smiled at Theo and then Draco. "Gentlemen, if you'll have a seat at the table, dinner will be right out."

After the wizards left the kitchen, an idea came to Hermione. She pulled the souvenir wine glasses out of the cabinet. Several years ago, on their two year anniversary, Hermione and Theo had gone to Hawaii and had brought back huge, oversized wine glasses that said "The Magic Never Dies in Wailea". They were actually quite cheesy, but they had bought them when they were drunk. When they got back, she didn't have the heart to throw them out. She brought the three large wine glasses out and waved her wand, moving the wine from their existing glasses to the new ones. She then waved her wand and filled them each with more wine.

"I thought since we are less than two weeks away from our seven-year anniversary, we should drink out of these wonderful souvenir glasses from an earlier anniversary." She smiled brightly from Theo to Draco.

Theo smiled back. "What a great idea, kitten! Although that's a lot of wine for a work night!"

Draco looked at her and smiled. "Yes, I would say one of these glasses equals two of a normal glass."

Hermione smiled back, with a slightly deviant expression. "A glass is a glass."

Hermione congratulated herself for getting one over on her pretend Dominant. She waved her wand and the shepherd's pie floated into the dining room. Each plate was served a hefty portion, except hers which only had a small serving.

She sat down and lifted her glass, toasting Draco. "Cheers, Gentlemen. It's wonderful having you here Draco." She smiled brightly at him, but it was a smile of defiance.

"Thank you, Hermione. It's wonderful to be here." He was returning her smile, but his was more of a smirk. Draco's eyes then went to her plate and noticed the small serving. He looked

back up at her. His glare conveying his displeasure. Theo was too busy eating to notice any of it.

Hermione smirked back, daring him to say anything.

Chapter 4

Disclaimer: I own nothing and make nothing monetary off this fanfiction.

Thanks to my awesome co-writer, LissaDream and our amazing BETA, RaynePhoenix2

Thanks for reading and reviewing!

Wednesday Evening continued...

Hermione smirked back at Draco, daring him to say anything

The three began to eat and after a moment, Theo broke the silence. "Kitten, this is delicious."

Draco was quick to add his compliments as well.

"Thank you. I'm glad you both like it." Hermione picked up her wine glass and took a very large swallow and then proceeded to take a second all while determinedly ignoring Draco. After putting the now empty glass down, she refilled it.

Theo and Draco began conversing about some mutual friends and Draco talked about some new business deals he was pursuing. Hermione continued drinking more than she knew she should and eating very little. If Draco hadn't *demanded* she limit her wine intake, she probably would have stopped after one glass, but obeying him would set a bad precedent.

Every now and then she would catch Draco looking at her plate or her glass. Despite her rebellion, she couldn't deny the light thrum of excitement she was feeling, and the truth was, she was enjoying their little game. She was almost half way through her second glass when she began to feel the effects of the alcohol.

Draco smiled at her. "Hermione, you've made such a wonderful meal. Aren't you hungry?"

"You know, oddly enough, I seem to have lost my appetite," she responded with no small hint of defiance in her tone.

Theo looked up from his plate. "Are you feeling ok?"

Hermione gave her husband a reassuring glance, "Actually, I feel good. I'm just not hungry." She took another large swallow of wine.

Theo reached over and picked up her plate, dumping what she hadn't consumed onto his own. She watched him scoop forkful after forkful into his mouth and couldn't stop herself from remembering when Theo cared if she ate or not. Now, it didn't even phase him. She felt herself starting to get a little upset. *Why does this bother me so much?* It was an unnecessary question. She knew the answer. *It was what his change in behavior represented more than the*

behavior itself. The simple truth was he didn't care enough anymore to be bothered. It must have been exhausting to be so focused on her all the time all those years ago. And it wasn't like she made it easy for him. She gave him plenty grief for his efforts. But it didn't change what she believed in her heart of hearts. He may love you, but not like he used to.

Hermione realized she was likely being irrational, but it didn't mean she wasn't correct. Or, at least, partially correct. She picked up her glass and took another large sip. When she felt the blond to her right staring, she chanced a glance at him; Draco's look said it all. She was in trouble. Well, not really. She wasn't *actually* his submissive, after all, but if she were, she would be in for a scolding and perhaps... a spanking. A slight heat tinged her cheeks as she imagined it. She had to admit he was strikingly handsome and she found herself wondering what it would be like to submit to him... to be spanked by him. What would sex be like with him. She rolled her eyes as she took another swallow and chastised her wayward thoughts. *Stop it, Hermione!*

Despite her determination to think about something else, she started to find humor in the irony of the situation. Draco was looking at her and behaving like she wished her husband would. There was no justice in this world.

"Kitten, do we have any ice cream?"

Hermione was pulled out of her internal musings by Theo's question. She thought for a minute and realized that not only did they not have ice cream, but they didn't have any dessert at all.

"I'm sorry, no. We're out and I completely forgot to get some at the store."

Theo shrugged like it was no concern. "How about I get us some. I'll just dash out and grab some Vanilla."

Typical, Hermione thought, Vanilla is exactly what I don't want. Hermione sensed the danger in this proposal and found herself sobering quickly. "Oh Theo, I couldn't eat another bite. Aren't you full? Also, we don't have any sauce."

"I'm full, but I just want a little something sweet. How about you, Draco?"

Draco smiled at Theo. "Ice cream sounds great." He then turned and gave Hermione a devilish grin.

Hermione's heart started to race. *Fuck!* "Draco, why don't you go with Theo?"

Theo waved off the suggestion. "Nonsense. I'll be right back. Draco stay here and keep my lovely wife company."

Draco was speaking to Theo but was looking at Hermione with a very satisfied expression when he replied in an innocent tone, "I'll take good care of her while you're gone."

"I'll be back in no time." With that, Theo stood and grabbed his robes before he walked out the front door.

Hermione stared at the table, refusing to look at the blond next to her. She could feel his eyes on her and after a moment of silence she couldn't resist glancing at him. The intensity of his stare caused a warmth to creep up her skin. She hated her body for its betrayal.

He stood up, looking down at her and spoke as though she was his to reprimand. “You realize you are begging for me to punish you. Your behavior tonight was unacceptable, and you behaved that way in full knowledge of what it would lead to. It begs to reason you *want* to be punished.”

Hermione didn’t move. She stared straight ahead, as though she were ignoring him, and chose not to grant him a response. *Was he right?* No. She would not let him intimidate her. Unable to resist the pull, she glared up at him with every bit as much ferocity as he inflicted on her. She responded defiantly, “You continue to be under the delusion that I’m going to submit to you, Malfoy.”

Without a second’s hesitation, Draco reached down and grabbed her arm to pull her to her feet. “And you continue to be under the delusion you won’t.” He was close enough that he could kiss her. His gaze flickered from her mouth to her eyes. “We don’t have much time, so here’s what’s going to happen. You’re going to come to my office tomorrow morning at nine sharp and you are going to *ask* me to punish you.”

Hermione pulled away from his bruising fingers and took a step away. “What makes you think I’m going to do any of that?”

Grasping her arm again, he pulled her even closer than before. His hands dug into her upper arms as they stood practically nose to nose. “Because you are *begging* for it, Granger. And because if you don’t, I’m going to walk away from you. I won’t put up with this behavior. You know you want this, you just don’t want to admit it. But this is it, pet. This offer goes away at 9:05 tomorrow.”

Hermione was speechless. Her mind was reeling and she began to feel a little nauseated. She suddenly realized how drunk she really was. She looked up at him and the fire in his eyes made her knees weak. There was no point in denying it — he was right. She did want this. Badly. She realized she was going to do it. She was going to submit to Draco Malfoy. She hated herself for her weakness and hated him for being right.

She didn’t say anything, but Draco clearly knew what she was thinking. He reached his hand up and tenderly stroked her bottom lip with his thumb. He gave her a small smile and spoke softly, all traces of impatience gone. “It’s going to be so good, pet. I’m going to take such good care of you. You know that, don’t you?”

Hermione just stared into his eyes and didn’t say anything.

He dropped his hand and stepped back. In a stern and no-nonsense tone of voice he commanded, “No more alcohol tonight. You’re going to drink a large glass of water and finish it before Theo finishes his ice cream. Tomorrow morning you will eat breakfast and then you will come to me. You will accept your punishment and you will stop this denial.” He paused and then added, “In return, I’m going to make you a very happy witch.”

Draco stepped further away at the sound of the front door opening. Hermione grabbed the plates off the table with shaking hands and started to walk into the kitchen as Theo entered the dining room.

“That was quick,” Draco said.

Theo shrugged as he pulled the ice cream out of the bag. “There was no line. I hope you like mint chocolate chip.”

Hermione walked back in carrying two bowls with spoons and the ice cream scooper. She smiled at Theo and set the bowls in front of the wizards. She then walked back into the kitchen. When she came back out, she had a large glass of ice water in her hand.

Thursday Morning

Hermione didn’t sleep well. Finally, at five-thirty, she decided to stop fighting it and just get up. She took a long shower and then put on her blue dress and a black cardigan sweater with black heels. She decided on yogurt and fruit for breakfast as she couldn’t stomach anything heavy given what she was about to do. Theo came into the kitchen at seven and ate some oatmeal. At eight-fifteen she left for work after kissing her husband on the cheek.

She went to her office and grabbed her notes about Moxie’s complaint. She really did need to talk to Draco about it. Perhaps if her sanity returned before making what she knew would be the biggest mistake of her life, she could at least discuss Moxie’s grievance with the blond. She could leave his office with her integrity intact, her marriage still on solid ground and hopefully much needed answers for her client. Stepping outside, she walked down the block to calm her nerves before slipping into an alley and Apparating to Malfoy Enterprises.

Steeling her nerves, she entered the main doors and approached the elevator with friendly greetings to those she passed. A group of ten or eleven had congregated waiting for the lift. When it arrived, it was a tight fit, but all were able to enter. She could feel adrenaline coursing through her as the lift seemed to stop at each floor to let off a passenger. She was finally alone after the seventh floor and when the doors closed she felt a crush of anxiety. *What are you doing, Hermione?*

When the lift dinged her arrival and the doors opened, she stepped through them and walked the long narrow hall. An attractive blonde was sitting behind a desk as Hermione approached his office. The blonde smiled at her. “Mrs. Nott, please go right in. He’s expecting you.”

Hermione walked to his door and turned the handle. She paused for a beat and then entered. The second she saw him, her breath hitched. He was standing in front of his desk, his posture straight and tall and his grey eyes intense and focused on her. His hair was damp, which for some reason she found incredibly sexy. His eyes lazily scanned her from head to toe and back up again. She swallowed, frozen and unable to speak; the enormity of the situation crashing down on her. She knew she wanted this, there was no more denying it, but that didn’t mean she could actually go through with it. She started to sweat and feel lightheaded and then the room went fuzzy. Suddenly strong arms were around her, holding her up and guiding her to the sofa.

“It’s ok, pet. Breathe in and out. Just breathe.” He sat down next to her, rubbing her back tenderly.

After a moment she began to feel normal. “I’m... I’m sorry, Draco. I shouldn’t have come.”

He stood up and walked to the bar and poured her a glass of water. Handing it to her, he spoke softly. “Drink this. Drink all of it.”

Hermione looked up into his grey eyes, taking the glass. Her gaze stayed on his as she drank. "Drink all of it," he demanded as he watched her. He took the empty glass from her when she finished. "Better?"

She nodded. "Yes, much." She smiled softly. "Thank you." He put the empty glass on the bar and then sat in a chair across from her. He rested his elbows on his knees and leaned towards her. One hand on his chin rubbing under his lip, he simply watched her, as though contemplating something.

Hermione couldn't take the silence. "Draco, I.."

He interrupted her. "Granger, I know what you're going to say." He paused. 'I know this is hard for you and I know you're trying to talk yourself out of making what you probably think is a big mistake. But don't you deserve to be happy? You're always so busy taking care of others, but you need to take care of yourself as well. You have needs that you are denying. I can help you with that. I want to help you. You just need to let me.' He leaned back in the chair. "I know you want this. You wouldn't have walked in my door this morning if you didn't."

"I'm not denying I want this, Draco. I just... I can't do this to Theo."

"Theo is only going to find out if you tell him or if you give it away."

"Draco, its adultery. It's betrayal!" She leaned back and shook her head. "Don't you feel guilty? Don't you feel like you are stabbing your best friend in the back? Do you not care about him?"

Draco looked almost stunned for a moment. "Of course, I care about him and it would be unfortunate if Theo found out about any of this and was hurt. I would hate that. I don't want to hurt him. But, I want you. I've wanted you since third year when you punched me." His eyes traveled down her neck and back up to her eyes. His irises seemed to darken right before her. He stood and paced for a moment before looking down at her and speaking concisely and without hesitation. "I've wanted to control you, discipline you, spank you, fuck you, tease you, make you cry, make you smile, make you laugh, make you *beg* for..." He closed his eyes and took a deep calming breath. He opened his eyes. "Well, there it is. I've told you what I want. The question is, what do you want, pet? You want the boring marriage in the boring suburbs, with the boring sex life? Or, do you want more?"

"You say you want all those things, and you've wanted them for so long... How come you never said anything before now? How come you didn't ask me out before I ever married Theo?"

Draco shrugged dismissively. "I was promised to Astoria before I was ten. I didn't have a choice. You were a Muggle-born and my father was Lucius Malfoy. I had no hope. I also had no idea you had a submissive bone in your body... not until Theo told me when you started sleeping with him. We both tended toward a Dominant role in our relationships. He was so happy, and I was so *bloody* jealous. Here I was married to a fragile little bird who I couldn't possibly Dominate, at least not the way I wanted to. And there you were... Hermione Granger... brilliant, brave, skilled with a wand, powerful... and fucking submissive." He paused. 'I tried with Astoria... she was so meek and shy and frail... I thought she might make a good submissive, but it was a lost cause. She just didn't understand the dynamic.' His voice

became regretful. “She drew no enjoyment out of it. All I managed to do was confuse her and make her more insecure than she already was.”

Hermione considered his words for a moment. “You were always so attentive to her... you *doted* on her. I never saw a hint of Dominance in your behavior towards her.”

Draco didn’t say anything. He just watched Hermione with a slight agitation in his countenance. Hermione could tell he was on edge and probably expected her to run out the door any minute.

“Draco, even if I submit to you, I’ll never leave my husband. I love him. This... whatever we would be doing, it can’t interfere with my marriage. I won’t hurt Theo.”

“I don’t want to be married, Granger. Not to you, not to anyone. But I’m a red-blooded male — a Dominant male — and I’ve been denied long enough. If it’s not you, it will be another... but make no mistake. You’re the one I want. I won’t have to worry about you wanting... more. You already have a husband. A husband you want to keep. That fits very nicely with what I want.”

“You won’t get jealous? We have sex on Saturday nights. I’ll still be sleeping with my husband.”

Draco’s eyes got large. “It’s worse than I thought! You have a designated night for sex?” He started to laugh. “Oh, Theo... dude!”

Hermione couldn’t help but become defensive of Theo and her marriage. It was one thing for her to make derogatory comments, but quite another for someone else.

“Well, it’s not *only* Saturdays. Yesterday for instance. I visited Theo at work. Took him quite by surprise, I might add.”

Draco grinned. “You went to see him after you left me, didn’t you?” He looked at her, knowingly. “You were angry but you were aroused... Tell me, what was Theo’s reaction? Was he pleased to see you? Did he give you what you wanted?”

Hermione swallowed. “He did what I told him to.”

“So, you got all hot and bothered by me and rushed to Theo where you had to tell him what to do?...Oh, pet. That’s just so... unnecessary. You could have just stayed right here and you would have been *more* than satisfied when you left.”

Her pulse was starting to quicken. He was looking at her *that* way. Intense, sexy, powerful, and knowing. She could feel the blush on her cheeks. She looked away. His gaze was too much and she could feel her resolve slipping.

“Look at me, Granger. Stop thinking.” He crouched before her and tilted her chin with his thumb and forefinger, forcing her to look him in the eyes. “It’s time you stop denying yourself. It’s time you stop denying me.”

Hermione didn’t try to look away. He was right, and it was time. She let out a slow breath. “Ok, Malfoy. You win.”

A soft smile turned into a wide grin. “No, pet. We *both* win.” He leaned toward her and kissed her forehead before standing and towering over her, once again. “Stand up,” he

demanded.

Hermione stood, her eyes not moving away from his.

He waited a moment and when she didn't speak, he cocked an eyebrow as he asked, "I believe there is something you want to ask me?"

Hermione swallowed. "Please... punish me. Please punish me for my behavior last night."

"Oh, pet. I thought you'd never ask."

Chapter 5

This chapter goes back and forth from Hermione's point of view to Draco's. I want to start writing more about his view of this relationship as well. Hope you like this chapter! Please review, follow or favorite if you like :) warning... LEMON!

Thanks to my co-writer, LissaDream and our wonderful BETA, RaynePhoenix2!

"Oh, pet. I thought you'd never ask."

As he stepped towards her, Draco could sense Hermione's apprehension. It wasn't just the faint trembling of her limbs or the way she chewed her bottom lip that gave her away; it was also the way her magic radiated in pulse like waves from her very being. He couldn't fault her, he was feeling the same nervous energy. After all — this was it! It was happening. She was *finally* submitting to him. He'd wanted this for so long but had never dared to let himself hope it would ever happen. How could it? She was not only married, but she was married to his *best* friend! However, circumstances had changed, and his mind had begun to toy with the possibility. When she walked into Malfoy Enterprises the day before and the opportunity presented itself, he had to make a move. He was a Malfoy after all. He was accustomed to getting what he wanted.

After another cursory glance of her lovely form, he leaned forward and gave her a soft kiss on the mouth before whispering, "Take off your sweater." Her chocolate eyes remained latched to his grey as she slowly slipped the cardigan off her slim frame. He took it from her and draped it over the chair behind him, internally relieved she hadn't run away at the first command.

He spoke to her softly... seductively, wanting her to feel reassured that she was making the correct decision. He didn't want her to have any hesitation now or any regrets later. "We are going to ease into this, Pet. Figure out what works for us... get a sense for our dynamic." He stroked her cheek. 'Get a feel for each other.' Walking around, so that he was behind her, he put his lithe fingers on her shoulders and massaged them gently. "You are rather tense, pet. Try to relax. Close your eyes and don't think, just feel. Listen to my voice and let me take over."

Some of the rigidity left her shoulders as his fingers continued to softly work out the knots. His thumbs focused on her neck, eliciting a soft exhale of air. He leaned in close, his tone as caressing as his words. "You're so beautiful. I'm the luckiest man alive right now." His lips pressed delicately to her neck and he inhaled her sweet, floral scent — it was a very inviting smell. Taking an intoxicating deep breath, he let it out slowly to keep his own nerves in check. He spoke softly, "I'm going to unzip your dress." His hand traced from her shoulder to the center zipper on her back where he slowly slid it all the way down to her lower back. Draco paused as he relished the moment.

Hermione's breath hitched when his hands made their way back to her shoulders and under the fabric of her dress. He delicately slid the silky material down her arms before moving his hands to the creamy skin of her waist where he shimmied the fabric over her shapely hips.

The dress susurrated gently as it softly pooled on the floor. Stepping closer so that his front was flush against her back, Draco circled his hands around her waist and then up, where he gently cupped her full breasts. He tugged the fabric of her bra cups down so that her nipples were lifted and exposed to him for the first time. Her breathing quickened, and her peaks hardened as he flicked and pinched them before palming the hand sized globes. Merlin, her tits were the perfect size.

“Your skin is so soft,” he murmured before twisting her nipples a little harder. She gasped at the sensation, arching her back in pleasure. He smiled devilishly as one hand continued its current ministrations while the other coiled its fingers around her delicate neck. His words oozed like honey, “I’m going to punish you and then I’m going fuck you.”

The heat in her belly morphed from a lazy simmer to a furious boil. It had been so long since Theo had touched her like this. It had been forever since he had spoken such delicious words. While she knew she had been missing it, she didn’t realize just how much until this very moment... and Draco had barely touched her. Her reaction was telling, though, a little breast play and some salacious whispers had her practically panting like a back-alley whore. She needed this more than she remembered — more than she imagined.

Draco languidly slid to his knees behind her, his fingers like tentacles slithering over her curves along the way. Leaning into her, he placed a lingering kiss on her right thigh, allowing his tongue a tentative taste before repeating the same motion on her left. He reveled in the sweet-yet-salty twang of her skin — like salted caramel. He could only imagine what her nectar would taste like when he would finally burrow his face between her thighs. It wouldn’t be long until he found out.

Draco slipped his hands under her panties and eased them down her toned legs. Unable to resist, his fingers spread her now dewy folds as he pressed his nose into her cave and inhaled her scent. *Ahhhh*. It was Eden. His imagination had not done her justice. She smelled of tropical sand and sea with a hint of citrus. It was an aphrodisiac if there ever was one. He wanted to bend her over and devour her until she screamed. She was Eve and he was the snake who would entice her, seduce her, corrupt her.

Taking a second to regain his composure, he stood and unlatched her bra, allowing it to fall to the floor with her panties and dress. He began to circle her, scanning her naked form for the first time. She was exquisite. All soft curves without being fat, toned muscles without being too masculine.

Then there were her eyes.

Eyes that were so very expressive.

Eyes that could scold, laugh, and tease.

Eyes that could cut him to the quick with ease, as they had done so many times over the years.

Theo was beyond a fool to take her for granted and push her away. Of course, he was also a bastard to have wandered from their marriage bed. Hermione had no idea and Draco would not be the one to tell her. Theo didn’t even know that Draco knew. Theo’s adultery that had been the impetus for Draco’s pursuit, though. If Theo was out there warming another witch’s bed, Draco would hardly feel guilty for warming Hermione’s.

Forcing himself to focus on the scene at play, Draco started to unbuckle his belt. “Granger, why are you being punished?”

“Because, I didn’t follow your instructions.” The only sound that followed her statement was Draco slowly removing his belt. The jingle of the buckle and the sliding of leather against fabric affected her exactly as he anticipated it would. Her skin was flushed yet pebbled and she shivered ever so slightly. She was aroused, there was no question.

“Not good enough, pet. Be specific,” he taunted as he moved to her side.

She cut her gaze at him to answer. “Because, I didn’t eat the food on my plate.”

“Eyes forward, pet. Why else?” Following his instruction, she stared at the wall but didn’t respond. “Tsk, tsk, Granger. Playing dumb doesn’t suit you.”

She took a breath and said resignedly, “Because, I drank more than you intended. I followed your instruction, only drinking two glasses, but I disobeyed your intent by using such large, oversized goblets.”

“Very good. Ground rule number one. When I tell you to do something, you do it. If you find the direction to be to your disliking, you are always welcome to ask me to reconsider. You will get 10 lashes from my belt. The first five will be warmup.” He walked around her. “Choose a safeword.”

Hermione thought fast. “Red, red is fine.”

“Widen your stance,” he instructed.

Draco watched with an unconcealed and covetous longing as she obeyed. After years of imagining, here she was. In the flesh, naked... submissive... exquisite. Bracing himself for the bliss of his fantasy becoming a reality, he whispered the incantation to soften the belt. He didn’t want to hurt her and didn’t know what her pain tolerance was. He was looking forward to finding out but decided he would take it slow.

He instructed calmly and softly, “Step forward and put your hands on the back of the sofa to brace yourself.” He watched her, assessing her stance. ‘Arch your back more.’ When her bottom was perfectly positioned he demanded, “Count after each strike. Safeword if it’s too much and I’ll stop. Understand?”

“Yes.”

“Yes, what?”

“Yes... sir.” Hermione could hardly recognize her own voice. She sounded almost timid — and she was *not* a timid witch! But just this once she would give herself a break. Just this once she would give into her sexual urges and would seek her pleasure, consequences be damned. And there was no question there would be consequences. Where was her voice of reason? Where was her conscience? Probably puddled on the floor drowning in her drenched panties. She pushed the self-doubt aside. She was already naked, and he had already had his hands all over her. Hell, the wizard had practically had his nose buried in her quim for Morgana’s sake. It was a little late to back out now. And in truth, she wasn’t going anywhere. This was it. She was doing this.

She startled when she felt the first slap of the belt against her bum. It didn't hurt, but it was loud. "One," she whispered.

Immediately a second clap of the belt landed and once again it didn't hurt. "Two."

Draco struck her three more times, never hitting the same spot twice.

It was with the sixth slap that Hermione felt the first real sting. She couldn't help the small squeal of surprise that escaped her. "Six," she choked out after taking a second to breathe.

Another hard strike and she immediately grunted, "Seven!" while holding back the tears that were threatening to spill. *Damn that smarts!*

An even harder landing at the tender junction of her right butt cheek and thigh had her yelp out, "Eight!"

The next one hit her at the mirrored spot on her other thigh and she felt a tear slide down her cheek. She barely got out the word, "Nine."

The tenth and last came fast and was the hardest, landing on both butt cheeks at once. "Ten," she cried out, losing all control as she let herself go. Her first sob was for the thrill of the spanking, while the second was for the betrayal she was committing. The rest of her tears were the cathartic release of the frustrations and emotions that had been bottled up for so long. Any semblance of strength left her as she let herself slide to the floor.

Draco dropped the belt and pulled her to his chest, not allowing her descent to the carpet. He easily lifted her into his arms and held her tight, whispering words of comfort and praise as he sat down on the sofa. He held her on his lap, rocking her and allowing her the release he knew she needed. He would not let her go until she was calm. She wrapped her arms around him and pressed her face into his neck as he stroked her hair and spoke soothingly to her. "That's it", he whispered. "Let it all out." She did for a while, but soon her cries became hiccupped whimpers before diminishing to sniffles as Draco simply held her.

A minute or so after the sniffles stopped, he lifted her chin so that she was looking him in the eyes. "You okay?" He asked affectionately.

She nodded, whispering, "Yeah, I'm okay."

Draco's breath was almost taken away by the sight of her. Her eyes were puffy, and her cheeks were wet, yet she was the most beautiful woman he had ever held. He kissed her, unable to wait another minute. Her lips were soft, and he could taste the salt from her tears. Their kiss started out gentle but quickly became urgent and needy. After a minute, he laid her back onto the sofa, kissing down her throat to her breasts, where he feasted on the pillowy flesh.

When he suddenly stood, Hermione moved to sit up, looking at him questioningly. "No, don't move," he demanded. His gaze had regained its intensity from earlier and at once Hermione felt like she was the last T-bone steak at a starving man's banquet. Stormy grey irises glittered with flashes of lust as he glanced from her naked breasts to the apex of her thighs and then back to her face. He started to unbutton his shirt and then changed his mind with an impatient swish of his wand, divestoeing himself of every article of clothing.

He towered naked over her and Hermione couldn't help but to look at him... all of him. His chest and arms were toned and more muscular than she had realized. He had no hair on his chest and his abdomen was flat with the faint crests and valleys of a toned abdominal six pack. He began to stroke his prominent erection while looking at her.

"Massage your breasts," he instructed. After a minute, his voice sounded almost strained when he commanded she pinch her nipples.

Hermione followed his demands, never breaking eye contact. She may be the one on her back, doing as she was told but she held no illusion she didn't hold power over him. The need and the longing on his face said it all.

"Move your hands down your body, Hermione." His voice was a low rumble that caused her breath to hitch. He gave a small smirk as he commanded, "Touch your clit."

His look was nothing short of avaricious as her fingers slid through her trimmed curls and began to swirl and press the sensitive flesh of her clitoris. Her lissome form began to arch as her hips began to undulate. He swallowed heavily as he watched her slowly lose herself to her carnal need. "Stop." His command was exhaled on an unsteady breath and when Hermione's chocolate depths swam up to his stormy ones, she found them almost depraved with need.

A wave of his wand and suddenly her hands were bound above her head. A deviant and lecherous smile spread across his face as he watched her tug on the binds, causing her breasts to jiggle deliciously. "I could watch touch yourself for hours, but right now the only hands that will be touching that luscious pussy are mine."

A thrum of exquisite need overcame her as he straddled her, kissing her mouth tenderly before nipping her bottom lip and then traveling to her breasts. After suckling each nipple in turn, his lips caressed and worshipped as he made his way to her midriff. He paused for just the briefest hint of a second before he lowered his mouth to the apex of her thighs. If he were a spiritual man, he would have declared he had achieved nirvana. He spread her wide before nestling in to make himself at home. She let out a guttural moan as his tongue lapped, prodded, and teased the slippery, scrumptious flesh. He slipped first one and then two fingers inside of her, moving them in and out as he continued to feast. Just when she was about to climax, he pulled away and began to slide up her body, earning him a groan of disapproval.

Draco chuckled, "All in good time, pet. All in good time." His hand continued to rub and stimulate the bundle of nerves at the top of her slit as his lips once again found purchase along the curves of her torso. After a detour to her pebbled areolas and peaks, he continued up until his lips hovered over hers.

The words were simple. "I'm going to fuck you now." As soon as they fell off his tongue, he was in her. One hand gripped her thigh to hold her open as the other grabbed a handful of hair and pulled back, exposing her neck as he sheathed himself. Her keen of ecstasy made him smile as he tenderly bit the cords of her neck. Desperate pants of needed air met her ears and it shocked her when she realized they were her own. She pulled desperately on her binds, wanting to sink her fingers into his platinum locks. He mercilessly ignored her straining as he began to move at a languid pace. Torturing her with slow, easy strokes while he emptied and filled her over and over again as though time would stand still and wait for them.

Draco told himself he had to go slow. He wanted to pound — he wanted to claim, but she felt too good. He knew if he moved any faster it would all be over much too quickly. He wanted their first time to be memorable. He focused on his breathing as he fucked the woman he had been fantasizing about since he was thirteen. *Easy, Draco. Easy.*

She threw her head back, moaning as she pressed her hips to his. *Yes! Finally!* she screamed internally. This was what she had been missing. He felt so incredibly good inside of her and his desire for her was intoxicating. His need for her was like a tonic for her soul. It had been too long since Theo had looked at her like this, touched her like this, and desired her like this. But, she didn't want to think about Theo... not now, anyway.

"Eyes on me," he whispered as though he were peering into her thoughts. She immediately locked eyes with him as he stroked in and out of her. "You feel amazing," he whispered as he grabbed her behind both knees, lifting her higher and wider. Unable to hold back any longer, he began to pound harder, pushing himself deeper. Hermione could feel her climax building as he continued to move, hitting that special spot inside her that drove her wild.

"Who do you belong to, pet?" he whispered. "Who will you obey? Who's going to take care of you from now on?"

Hermione was mewling and arching sinuously into him, and Draco couldn't help comparing her to a feral cat. He chuckled darkly. "My little lioness. You're such a good fuck."

His words prompted a growl as she turned her mouth to his neck and bit down gently. His filthy and wicked words were pushing her even closer to the edge.

Her teeth on his neck propelled him and he upped his pace even more, his heart about to pound right out of his chest. "Who do you belong to, pet? Answer me!" He demanded urgently.

A quick exhale of hot breath ghosted against his skin as she pulled her teeth and mouth off him to allow herself to answer in a choked voice, "You, I belong to you!"

In that moment, during her proclamation, her body seized with rapture and caused her walls to clamp around him. His body shook and then tightened, like a coil about to spring as he let out a moan of what sounded like anguish before he collapsed on to her, his chest heaving.

After a few moments, he pulled his face back and watched her as she came down from her own release. Her eyes were half lidded and her lips hinted at a smile. He offered a small smile in return as he moved his mouth to hers and hungrily claimed her lips in a punishing kiss. A minute or so later he pulled away and whispered the incantation to release her binds. Her arms immediately enveloped around him as she nuzzled tenderly into his neck. They repositioned themselves, so they were nestled on their sides facing each other, canvassing each other with tender kisses and caresses.

After a couple minutes they both realized it was getting late. Draco stood and held his hand out to her, helping her up. They dressed in silence. She pulled her sweater on and turned to him as he was buttoning up his shirt.

Unable to resist, he reached for her and pulled her towards him, kissing her passionately.

She pulled back from him after a minute. “What time is it?”

“Ten-thirty,” he responded, “I have a meeting in fifteen minutes.”

Hermione picked up her briefcase and her purse, finding herself at a loss for words. She didn’t want to think, she didn’t want to speak, she just wanted to bask in the glow that was still radiating through her.

Draco watched her, his mind already figuring out when he could see her again. “Pet, be here tomorrow at two o’clock.”

Her gaze met his, pondering if that worked for her. She realized then that she would make it work, and responded quietly, “Okay.”

Hermione didn’t miss how his look was slightly smug — he was clearly pleased with her compliance. After he walked her to the door, she turned to him, smirking. She may have agreed to submit to him, and he may have just proven himself to be quite able in the sack, but she was still Hermione and she would still fight for her client. “By the way, I’m having lunch with Rita Skeeter today to discuss Moxie Graggot. Just thought you’d like to know.” She smiled mischievously up at him.

“Ciao”, she said with a wink as she turned away before striding down the hall with a confident sway to her hips, leaving a speechless Draco Malfoy behind her.

Chapter 6

Thanks so much for reading! Please review if you don't mind!

Co-written by LissaDream

BETA — RaynePhoenix2

Hermione dashed out of Malfoy Enterprises and Apparated to her office. Lizzy smiled brightly upon her arrival, "Good Morning, Hermione!"

Hermione forced as normal a response as possible, appearing calm and masking the inner turmoil she was experiencing. "Good morning, Lizzy. Anything interesting come our way so far today?"

"No, it's been very quiet. No floos or owls to speak of," Lizzy responded as she glanced at her desk and around the office. "I've been doing some cleaning and organizing this morning."

Hermione quickly scanned the space, noticing how nice the office looked. "It looks great, Lizzy," Hermione replied, trying to sound natural and not like her world had just tilted its axis. "I'll be in my office preparing for my lunch with Rita if you need me."

Hermione quickly disappeared into her office, shutting the door behind her. She dropped her purse and briefcase on her desk as she walked to the window and looked out at the street. Her thoughts were whirling with everything that happened this morning.

She had done it.

She had not only cheated on her husband but had done so with her husband's best friend.

She had not only had sex with him but had submitted to him and would be doing so again tomorrow.

Somehow, submitting to another wizard made it that much worse.

She rested her forehead against the window and let the guilt begin to take hold. It was bad enough she had slept with Draco, but D/s had been a big part of her sex life with Theo from the time they dated through the first two years of their marriage. It was *their* thing and even though Theo wasn't into it anymore, it felt like a massive betrayal playing the submissive for another man. *As if fucking another man isn't bad enough?!* She let out a heavy sigh, fogging the window in front of her. *Hermione, what have you done?*

She was officially one of *them* now. One of those women others talk about. One of those women who sleep around behind their husband's back and provide ample gossip around the coffee cart. One of those women whose every outfit and choice of lipstick is scrutinized and discussed as though the shoes they chose made them more guilty.

An adulteress.

A cheat.

A liar.

Looking back on her married life, Hermione could pinpoint when it all started to change. It was when Hermione became so involved with lobbying for magical creatures at the ministry. She had been working long hours and hadn't had the energy for sex, much less for playing the submissive. Theo had been very supportive, though, and had not pressured her or made her feel bad or like she was neglecting him in any way. It was a crazy three months and, when it was behind her, they started having sex more frequently again. The only problem was that Theo just didn't play the Dominant role anymore. Then over the course of six months or so, they gradually had sex less and less frequently until the Saturday night sex routine took hold. That had been about four and a half to five years ago. Hermione had been unhappy with their sex life since then.

It was more than just their sex life, though; their whole marriage seemed to become routine. Everything from their schedules to the way they greeted each other or said goodbye to each other to the way they to the way Hermione always cooked dinner and Theo always took out the trash. *But that's normal isn't it?* she asked herself. *Routine is not necessarily a bad thing.*

Once again she scolded herself for criticizing her marriage. She loved Theo and didn't question his love for her. She trusted him completely and here she was screwing his best friend! *You're a terrible person and a horrible wife, Hermione Nott! Theo deserves better!*

But despite telling herself this and knowing it to be true, she knew she would not stop submitting to Draco. Not now that she had gotten a taste. A fix. He was everything Theo wasn't and everything she craved. Passionate, attentive, intense, and most of all... Dominant. The way he looked at her, touched her, and spoke to her... it had all been perfect. If she was truly honest with herself, perhaps she had been attracted to him for a while now. It seemed evident by the way she was craving his touch already... despite having just left him less than thirty minutes ago.

Trying to redirect her thoughts, she looked at the clock and noticed it was almost eleven. She was due to meet Rita at noon and needed to get her head in the game. Letting out a calming breath, she walked to her desk and proceeded to review her notes.

At twelve noon, Hermione entered *The Wayward Broom* and proceeded to the back-corner booth she and Rita usually sat at during these lunches. Rita was already there with her parchment and quill ready.

"Rita," Hermione said and smiled cordially as she sat across from the garish blonde. Rita extended the same greeting to Hermione. The two witches ordered their sandwiches and got to work. While Rita was known as a gossip writer, she was trying to become more respected as a journalist. She would jump at these opportunities Hermione presented her. This, of course, worked to Hermione's advantage. By the end of their lunch, Rita was excited. She not only had a current issue story, but it involved Malfoy Enterprises which meant the story would garner a lot of interest. It was a fact that stories about the Malfoys sold papers.

The Malfoys had been big news after the downfall of Voldemort. Lucius had served time in Azkaban for a couple years but was now home and living a quiet life. His reputation was

forever tarnished and the Ministry wanted no part in dealing with him. Draco, on the other hand, was viewed differently by the public as well as the Ministry. He had been young and had been manipulated by a controlling father and a megalomaniac madman living in his home. Draco had been forgiven for his involvement.

Lucius handed over the control of Malfoy Enterprises to Draco and Draco had taken it and built it into a huge, global success. Malfoy Enterprises was now the parent company over dozens of successful smaller businesses. These businesses included the wizarding department store, *Malfoy's*, which was hugely popular — both here and worldwide. There was also a string of restaurants, a law firm, an accounting firm, and a whisky manufacturer, to name a few other cauldrons the companies had their stirring rods in. They were all incredibly successful. The minute a business Malfoy Enterprises owned became anything less than profitable, it was sold or liquidated. Draco was a shrewd businessman.

He was also charitable, however. It was thanks to him that the library was being modernized. He also invested in their local community, there were new wizarding parks for children and a new magical creatures zoo. The zoo had only been open for six months but was already hugely popular. Draco had gifted the funds for these projects and in return he was well known and respected. Simply put, his name sold papers.

Rita was giddy with excitement as she headed back to her office to work on the story. Finally, some dirt about Malfoy Enterprises. She was even excited about the investigating she would have to do. How many non-wizard magical beings had they hired and how many of those had been women? What were the salary ranges for not only magical people vs. magical beings, but also witches vs. wizards? There could be more to uncover and Rita was on a mission to find out. Malfoy Enterprises might not have technically broken any laws, but public opinion was a fickle thing and public opinion might find him guilty. Speaking of breaking laws, it might be worth looking into any complaints from witches about being discriminated against by ME. If she could find a witch to claim she was passed over for a less competent wizard..? Well, that would be a huge story.

After her lunch, Hermione was tired. She sent a message to Moxie updating her with what she had done so far to investigate her complaint and then checked in with Lizzy before deciding to take the rest of the afternoon off. It was one-thirty in the afternoon when she Apparated home and the first thing she did was take a shower. She wanted to remove all remnants of Draco's scent from herself before Theo came home. She could still smell him on her skin... sandalwood and bergamot and something floral. Skimming her nose along her arm, she realized she could breathe him in. Hermione hated to wash it away but knew it would be dangerous if Theo took notice. She climbed into the shower and soaked in the hot spray and gazed at the rivulets of water dancing over her skin before dashing down the drain to vanish the evidence of her deceit.

She worked her cleansing hair potion through her locks and started thinking about what she would fix for dinner. It was while she was rinsing that she remembered it was Thursday. Theo had told her twice this week he had a get together tonight with his buddies from his old job at the Wizarding Literacy Project. WLP was an outreach program which helped wizards and witches who had trouble reading. They assisted all ages, from preschoolers to the elderly. Theo was passionate about books and reading, it was actually what had originally attracted Hermione to him. He was a wealthy wizard who did not need to work but chose to because of

his love of the written word and his desire to help others. He left WLP after he convinced Draco to invest in modernizing the library. Of course, neither Draco, the librarian, nor the ministry would agree to the upgrades unless Theo helped see it through. So, Theo left WLP a couple months ago and had been working at the library ever since. Hermione was incredibly proud of her husband. Without his pushing Draco to invest, and encouraging the head librarian to endorse the upgrades, the ministry would have never green lighted the project.

Since leaving WLP, Theo missed his friends and Hermione was happy he would be seeing them tonight. This meant she was on her own for the evening. She dried herself and slipped into her robe before she walked into the living room to grab her book. When Theo floo'd into their flat just as she was sitting down to read, they were both surprised to find the other home.

Theo's shocked face quickly morphed into a smile and he walked to his wife and kissed her on the cheek. "Hey, Kitten. You're home early."

She smiled at him. "So are you! What are you doing home?"

"I, uhh... left something. A book I wanted to loan to Mick." He walked past her, towards the guest room which they used as a library. He came back out with a book in hand. "You'll be ok on your own tonight?" he asked her.

She shrugged. "Sure, I'll probably just go to bed early."

He kissed her on the cheek again and then grabbed a handful of floo powder. "Okay. I'll see you later. Don't wait up." He then tossed the powder into the fireplace and said, "Wizarding Library." He was gone.

She contemplated the empty floo for a moment. It was so odd that they both showed up at their flat in the middle of the afternoon. He didn't even ask her why she was home. He seemed to be in a hurry. Putting it out of her mind, she grabbed her book from where she had tossed it when Theo came in and opened it.

After staring at the same page for more than twenty minutes, she gave up on reading. Her mind kept wandering to that morning. She kept seeing Draco's eyes — dark and hungry. When she closed her own, she could feel his hands on her skin, his breath on her neck, on her stomach, on her... She rubbed her legs together, trying to quell the building arousal.

Was he thinking about her as much as she was thinking about him? Hermione found herself wondering what he was doing. Was he at work? At the Manor? His flat? Suddenly an uncomfortable thought came to mind. Was he seeing anyone? Sleeping with anyone else? She realized she couldn't say anything given that she was married, but that didn't change the fact that she didn't like the idea of him touching another witch. Or worse — Dominating another!

She knew she needed to stop thinking about it. She needed to stop thinking about *him*. She was married. It was reckless and immoral and felt wrong.

Yet, somehow, it felt so right. So good. She didn't like imagining his hands on another witch... his mouth on another's lips. His breath on another's breast. She knew she had no right to make demands of the wizard to be monogamous, yet the thought that he could be with another witch at this very moment made her feel ill.

After another few moments of thought, she considered it from another angle. While she didn't have the right to demand he touch only her, she *did* have the right to be certain he was

practicing safe, clean sex. She was clean. She had only slept with four men — Draco actually being the fourth. The first two had been right after the fall of Voldemort and then Theo had come along. So, she knew she was clean.

Was Draco? Was he promiscuous? Had he slept around behind Astoria's back? She began to feel uneasy, realizing that she had some questions for Draco. Questions she should have already asked.

She moved into her kitchen and poured herself a glass of wine, trying to quell her unease. Looking at her watch, she realized it was only three-thirty in the afternoon. She grabbed a piece of parchment out of the drawer. *"It's 3:30 and I've just poured my first glass of wine. On my own tonight... -H."*

Hermione looked at her note. Would he want to see her? Would he show up? She had questions for him, but mostly she simply wanted to see him. She took a swallow and debated whether to send it or not. Opening the window, she whistled her signature call for their pet owl, Bernie. The bird appeared within a minute or so and gave a soft hoot as he landed on the sill. She tied the note to his leg. *"Take this note to Draco Malfoy. Don't give it to anyone else. Come back after its delivered and I'll give you a treat."* The owl was off in a flash.

Hermione picked up her glass and took another large swallow. Deciding she needed to do something to keep her mind occupied, she sat at the dining room table and began working on her proposal for equal rights amongst all magical beings. She would have to present it to the review board for new business at the Ministry before she could present it to the full council for consideration. Therefore, it needed to be succinct and to the point. The review board had complete control over what was brought forward to the council. If they didn't like what she was proposing or didn't think that it had merit, it would be dead in the water. They had many proposals brought to them daily and the ones that were too wordy or complicated ended up being denied. She wouldn't say the review board was lazy, but they had short attention spans. Frankly they had too much power and not enough oversight, but that was an argument for a different day. Her proposal needed to grab their attention and get to the point. This was something Hermione struggled with as she tended to write too much.

She finished off her glass of wine as she jotted down the last piece of her rough outline for her proposal. Glancing at the wall clock, she was surprised it was already four-fifteen. Pouring herself another glass, she kept writing. When she heard a tapping at the window, she couldn't help the jolt of excitement that struck her when she spotted Bernie looking at her through the window with a note tied to his leg. She jumped up and let him in and relieved him of his charge. He let out a soft hoot of affection when she grabbed the piece of bacon she had set aside and gave it to him.

She quickly unrolled the parchment. *"5pm..be ready... D"*

Hermione glanced at the clock again. It was four-forty. She wondered what he meant by 'be ready'? Were they going out? She changed into her light blue sundress and tossed her hair into a messy bun before polishing off her second glass of wine. She felt a little tipsy, but she wasn't drunk. Rather than pour another drink, she put the glass in the dishwasher knowing she needed to keep a clear head. She had questions for the wizard.

When she heard the knock on the door, she felt excitement peppered with dread. *Stay calm, Hermione*, she coached herself. Opening the door, she was the picture of composure on the

outside, but on the inside she felt warm, frenzied flutters in her gut the second her eyes drank him in. Still in his suit, he had touch of a five o'clock shadow and his hair was messy, as though he had been running his hands through it. His appreciative gaze was licentious as it seemingly undressed her right there in the entrance foyer. She stepped aside and gestured for him to enter, shutting the door softly as he walked past her.

He asked in a low and sultry voice. "Are we alone?"

"Umm, yeah. Theo's —" But she didn't get to finish her sentence. He grabbed her by the waist and pulled her to him, crashing his mouth onto hers. His kiss was needy, urgent. She melted into him and threaded her fingers through his silky, platinum locks. After a moment, he pulled back from her and looked at her with eyes somehow even more heated than only a moment ago. He said quietly, 'I won't fuck you in his home.' Before she could voice her complete agreement, he told her firmly, "We're going to my flat. Grab whatever you need — quickly."

Hermione Accio'd her purse as Draco opened the front door. Looking at her expectantly, she quickly dashed through it, her inner submissive already basking in his taking control. As soon as they were out the door and Hermione set the wards, Draco pulled her close and quickly Apparated them into his flat.

Once there, he picked her up and threw her over his shoulder, carrying her down the hall. She almost giggled out loud as the words "me Tarzan, you Jane" came to mind. In a flash she found herself tossed onto his bed.

Sprawled out before him, he stood at the side of the four poster staring down at her with an intensity that Hermione had not seen from him in many years. It was similar to the looks of rage she had witnessed all those years ago when they were children. This time, however, there was definite need and desire mixed in as well. He exuded dominance in a way Theo never could have dreamed of. The muscle behind her ribcage began to beat furiously and she found herself slowly scooting away from him.

A strong hand grasped her ankle, prohibiting her escape. "You've been a very bad witch, Miss Granger."

Chapter 7

“You’ve been a very bad witch, Miss Granger.”

Hermione’s stomach was doing flips. The way he was looking at her, it was pure heat. Her arousal was sprinkled with dashes of trepidation as his hand released her ankle, his expression made it quite clear she was not to squirm away from him.

He took off his jacket and started to undo his tie as he looked at her.

Hermione swallowed. “By bad... do you mean...”

He didn’t allow her to finish. “You’ve been talking to Rita Skeeter. Putting ideas in that ridiculous witch’s head. Leading her to believe we’ve been breaking discrimination laws.” He threw his tie on the chair beside the bed and slowly started to remove the serpent cuff links from his shirt sleeves.

Hermione shook her head, adamantly. “No, no... I merely..”

He paused his movement and raised his brows. “You deny you talked to Rita?” He asked before beginning to unbutton his shirt.

Hermione bit her lip, contemplating her response. She proceeded cautiously. “Well, no... I told you I was meeting with her.”

He ran his hands through his hair, an exasperated sigh escaping his mouth. “You are an infuriating witch, Granger. You always have been and it’s clear you always will be.”

Hermione’s jaw fell and her eyes narrowed. “It’s hardly fair for you to...” Draco waved his wand and suddenly there was silence. She was speaking, moving her mouth but there was no sound. Realizing what he had done, she began to sit up. Did he honestly think she would stand to be handled in such a way?

Sensing she was about to go for her wand, he pounced. In a flash he was on her, straddling her, his stormy-grey glare freezing her resistance. Long manicured fingers wrapped around her small wrists, pinning them to the bed on either side of her head. Unable to resist, she tried to wiggle out of his control. She thrashed her hips and twisted her forearms, fighting his hold only to find her ministrations proved fruitless and brought a wicked gleam to his eyes. Her breath hitched and her belly clamped with an intense pulse of arousal and it was obvious this was a game they both enjoyed.

His voice was deep and husky and ignited her desire like fire whisky poured over a flame. “It’s time we establish some rules, Pet. When you are in my presence, acting as my submissive, you will not speak unless you are given permission. If I ask you a question you will answer, but you will not make a sound in any other circumstance. Understand?”

Her chest swelled with each breath from her exertions and after a moment she relented. She mouthed “yes” as her mind began reeling with thoughts of Rita and what she might have done or said to get Draco so riled up. Underneath that thought process was a continued

visceral reaction to his physicality... as well as his words, the tone of his voice, and most importantly, his eyes. His eyes were fierce and impassioned, and they spoke volumes more than any words that spilled out his mouth.

Draco slid off the bed and released the spell, their eyes still locked onto each other. She could hear her own breathing again and contemplated the chin wag she'd like to give him for silencing her. She stopped herself however, deciding now was not the time to argue with him; not that she was capable at this particular moment anyway. She could barely maintain a coherent thought given how aroused she was.

Draco watched her closely. He could see the effect he was having on her. Her skin was flushed, and her fawn irises were darkened with desire. Her legs were squirming under her skirt and he was dying to delve between those succulent thighs. He had played this perfectly. It was true Rita Skeeter had paid him a visit just prior to him seeing Hermione, but he knew Rita's tactics and knew what she was capable of. He also knew the magnificent witch sprawled on his bed. Granger would want the meat of Rita's story to be about Hermione's precious goblin and the unfair world goblins and other magical creatures live in. Rita's digging for information about discrimination against witches was not part of Hermione's plan. Therefore, he knew Rita was pursuing her own agenda. He was not as angry at Hermione as he was leading her to believe. But he wanted her on edge... nervous... anticipating what he would do next.

He was impressed that she held her tongue and didn't argue with him. She really did have the makings to be an exemplary submissive. He was very eager to see just how far he could push her and just how much control she would give him.

It was time he told her his expectations. He took a deep breath and stood taller, his gaze boring into her. "Stand beside the bed, Pet." He gestured to the spot next to where he was standing and watched as she slid off the bed and stood facing him. He reached up and traced her bottom lip with his thumb while taking a step closer so that he was standing inches from her, their noses almost touching. He didn't speak as he placed his hands on her hips. Their eyes remained locked as he slowly bunched up her sundress into his hands, moving the skirt up her legs. Once the fabric was gathered completely, he lifted the dress over her head, leaving her standing in her bra, panties and sandals. Without taking his attention off her, he tossed her dress onto the chair with his tie.

Grabbing a pillow off the bed, he took a step back and dropped it on the floor between them. "Slip off your sandals and kneel, Pet."

Hermione kicked off her shoes and gingerly dropped to her knees on the pillow.

Stepping further away, he contemplated her. She was physically perfect in his opinion. She was thin but not skinny. She had curves but wasn't fat. She had flawless, soft, pale skin that begged to be caressed. His trousers were suddenly very tight and, willing himself to maintain control, he closed his eyes and forced images into his head to temper his arousal.

After a moment, when his control was restored, he opened his eyes and spoke softly, but firmly. "When you are with me, as my submissive, the following rules apply;

"Firstly, as I mentioned, you will not speak unless asked a question or given permission." He slipped his shirt off, leaving him in a white undershirt and dress pants. Unbuckling his

belt, he continued.

“Secondly, you will also do as I say, when I say it and you will do it without hesitation. If you hesitate, or disobey, you will be punished.” He watched her closely after this direction, certain she would protest. A very small part of him wanted her to rebel. A fired-up Granger made for good fun, after all. That would never change.

He stepped close, towering over her and when it was clear she wasn’t going to argue, he drove the point home. “In short, when we are alone, you... belong... to me.” He gave her a small predatory grin as his eyes raked over her form and then back to her eyes. He pulled his t-shirt off. “I’m sure there will be more rules as we develop this... *arrangement*.”

Hermione’s insides quivered when he said ‘arrangement.’ He said it slowly and seductively and it sounded sinful coming out of his mouth. It held an unspoken promise that made her skin prickle with shivers of anticipation.

She watched him as he peered down at her with a savage glint in his eyes. He was beautiful and exuded pure masculinity. It wasn’t that he was a perfectly chiseled Adonis, because he wasn’t (although he was close), it was the confidence and power he exuded. It was intoxicating, and she found herself flustered as her mind spun with the words he was saying and what they meant, all while being distracted with thoughts of his body and what it could do to her. She was so ready for him to toss her on the bed and ravish her. As he took his belt off, memories of him spanking her in his office left her practically panting with need. She could feel warmth creep over her chest, neck and cheeks and moisture coat between her legs. If he didn’t touch her soon she was going to combust.

Giving her a minute to absorb and process what he said, he watched with satisfaction as a beautiful blush washed over her skin. He asked her softly. “Do you have any questions so far?”

Hermione shook her head. She felt heavy with need and didn’t want to talk. She just wanted to feel. His hands, his lips, his cock.

He slowly shook his head. “Now, now Pet. Is that an acceptable response? Try again.”

What? Response? Oh yeah, he had asked a question. She swallowed and whispered, “No. I don’t have any questions.”

He sighed heavily. “Pet. I’ll give you one more chance. Believe me, you’re in enough trouble for sending Skeeter my way. Try again. Do you have any questions so far?”

“No, sir.” Hermione said, barely above a whisper.

Draco smiled. “There... was that so hard?”

He stepped towards her, pulling his belt off. “Stand up,” he whispered.

Her legs were stiff from kneeling and she welcomed the change in position. He slowly circled her until he was hovering behind her very close. He tilted his head down and brushed his nose from behind her ear, down her neck to her shoulder where he placed a tender kiss. He inhaled deeply, sending tingles down her spine. He whispered seductively, “Tell me, Pet... do you like being spanked?”

Instantly, she remembered his belt against her bum. It caused her breath to hitch and her knees to feel weak. "Yes." She choked in a whisper.

A hard slap came down instantly on her bottom. "Yes, what?" Draco demanded.

Hermione jumped from the shock of the slap, but quickly responded. "Yes, sir."

Draco grinned, relishing her obedience as he tenderly kissed her other shoulder.

"Are you hungry, pet?" He whispered.

Food? Who could think about food at a time like this? "No, sir."

He stepped back and said simply as he playfully slapped her bottom, "Well, I'm hungry. Fix me something to eat. I'm going to shower. When I come out of the shower, I'll expect dinner on the table and you kneeling beside it." Without looking back, he went into the ensuite, closing the door behind him.

Hermione watched as the door clicked shut, flabbergasted. *What... the... hell?! Get her all worked up and then demand she prepare dinner? And kneel at the table? Screw that!* What was going to be next? Her doing his laundry? Her heart began to pound with rage and not a small amount of disappointment. What was he playing at? She continued standing in the same spot, staring at the door, half expecting him to come back out laughing, telling her he was teasing and to get on the bed.

Suddenly the door did open. Unfortunately, Draco smirked as he peeked out at her. "You're running out of time, Granger. I take quick showers."

"Bastard," she mumbled to herself when she heard the water come on.

Her mind was racing. What to do? Then it hit her. She'd show him. Spotting her sundress, she slid it on. After all, he didn't tell her she couldn't dress. She stalked to his kitchen, muttering obscenities under her breath as she opened his cabinets and his fridge contemplating her next move. She pulled the bread out of the bread box and fixed him a peanut butter sandwich, surprised to have found a jar in his pantry. Personally, she was like most Brits and found the spread repulsive, but clearly, he liked it or it wouldn't be in his kitchen. She put the sandwich on a paper towel and placed it at the head of his table, while at the same time deciding she would not provide him with something to drink. She smiled to herself as she opted to kneel on one of the chairs at the table. He didn't say she had to fix him a beverage and he didn't say the meal had to be hot. He also didn't say she had to kneel on the floor. He would have only himself to blame. He should have been more specific with his instructions. A small voice in her head told her she was playing with fire, but she didn't care. She would rather take a spanking than kneel like a dog at the table while he ate dinner. That was just too much!

Draco stood in the shower, letting the cool water wash over him. He had to get away from her before he lost control. He was incredibly aroused and so ready to bend her over and just take her. But he knew if he did that he wouldn't last a minute. So, here he was, taking a cold shower after a quick wank to get himself back under control. He grinned knowing what she was currently thinking. He knew without question she was struggling internally over his instructions. He knew she would fight it. But just how much would she defy him? Would he walk out to a hot meal and a submissive Hermione kneeling at the foot of his chair? He

doubted it. He was looking forward to her defiance as it was going to be so much fun punishing her.

He continued to stand under the water, taking a nice long shower.

Hermione's mind was reeling. Where the hell was he? Did he not just tell her he took quick showers? He had been in there a good thirty minutes. *Damn him!* She repositioned herself as her legs were starting to cramp from kneeling on the chair for so long. Finally, she could hear the water turn off. The long wait had given her plenty of time to doubt her course of action. She was torn between feeling smug and feeling like she was making a huge mistake. It wouldn't have been hard to heat up a little pasta. She had no idea what his reaction would be.

After what felt like an hour, Draco finally emerged... shirtless, with towel dried hair and faded jeans. *Don't look at him, don't flush and don't show weakness*, she coached herself. She would be strong and not let him see how he affected her. She had been practically naked and at his mercy and his appetite was more for food than for her.

As he walked towards the table, she kept her head bowed as she kneeled, staying as still as possible. She could feel his eyes on her as he approached and was surprised when she heard him chuckle.

Draco couldn't help the chortle that escaped him. She was so predictable. He noted the sandwich on the napkin as well as the slightly defiant upturn of the corners of her mouth as she kneeled on the chair, in the exact spot he imagined he would find her.

There was a knock on the door. Hermione's eyes shot up to his, slightly panicked.

"Relax, Pet. That will be the takeout I ordered." He smiled a victorious grin as he sauntered to the front door, opened it and paid the delivery witch. He walked back into the dining room and put the Indian cuisine on the center of the table. He looked into Hermione's shocked and clearly irritated face and shook his head at her with obvious pity. "Oh Pet, you need to understand that as your Dominant I will *always* be one step ahead of you. I know you soo much better than you realize."

Waving his wand towards the kitchen, a plate, utensils, napkin and a glass of wine magically hovered to the dining room table. He prepared his plate and then sat opposite of where Hermione had placed his sandwich.

Another wave of his wand and the peanut butter sandwich slid across the table and landed in front of her. She looked down at the offensive sandwich and then up at him.

Draco began to eat what smelled like delicious Tandoori chicken with lentil beans and Nan bread. He looked over at Hermione's incredulous face. "Eat your sandwich, Pet." He watched as she ignored his command. 'You are only making it worse for yourself. Eat your sandwich and then I will spank you for your disobedience.' Taking a sip of wine, he clarified. "I'll spank you for going to Skeeter, I'll spank you for your behavior tonight and I'll spank you because I simply love spanking your delicious ass." He chuckled as he took another bite of chicken before swallowing and taking another sip of wine. "After that, I'll fuck you right on this table." He looked up into her brown eyes. "Or, you can decide this isn't for you and you can leave... right now."

Those were her only two choices? Hermione was livid. Livid at herself for falling for his trap and livid at him for tormenting her like this. She should just get up and leave! On the other hand, she was aroused. His delicious promise to spank her and then fuck her on this very table? Well, that was what was making her heart race. But could she do it? Could she humiliate herself and do as he demanded? She stared at the sandwich, the enormity of her decision once again weighing heavy on her mind. She decided she could and she would. She had been raised a Gryffindor, after all.

She offered him a small defiant smile as she picked up the sandwich and took a big bite.

Ten minutes later her sandwich was finished, and her mouth felt like it was glued together from all the disgusting peanut butter. She would be damned if she was going to ask him for something to drink. Instead, she sat watching him as he took sip after delicious sip of his wine in between bites of the savory smelling chicken.

He looked up from his plate after a few minutes and studied her face. "I'm sure you are thirsty, Pet. You may leave the table and get a glass of water. After you have quenched your thirst, you will go to the bathroom and wash the green dye off your knees." He chuckled once again at her shocked expression.

Hermione slid off the chair, well hobbled off the chair is more like it as she was so stiff from kneeling for so long that she could barely move her legs. After she was standing, she looked down. She had green dye all over her skirt, knees and shins. She looked back up at him, her expression one of fury.

"Oh, Pet. I am very sorry about your dress," he said in a tone that didn't sound very sorry at all. "If you hadn't defied me, as I clearly predicted, you would not have kneeled in the green dye I placed on that chair. Perhaps next time you will do not only as told, but as intended as well. This is a lesson you seem to be struggling with," he added, teasingly.

Hermione wanted to walk over to him and slap him. She wanted to kick and yell and scream... but she knew she only had herself to blame. First thing was first; she needed to get the dye off her skin. She decided to forego the glass of water and marched into his bathroom where she was surprised to see a bottle of ink removing potion sitting on the rim of the sink. All of the fury rushed out of her as she stared at the potion. She picked up the bottle and poured some onto a flannel before dabbing her green skin and dress. The color came off both quite easily. When she finished, she sighed and sat on the toilet seat lid. He had played her perfectly. She felt deflated and no longer aroused or excited. She simply wanted to go home.

She continued to sit in the bathroom, contemplating everything. She did not want to walk out and face him. Face his gloating.

There was a gentle knock on the door before it opened. Draco stepped inside and leaned against the door frame, looking down at her. She wouldn't look up at him. He let out a heavy sigh and crouched down in front of her. She still wouldn't look at him. He took his right hand and tilted her chin up, forcing her brown eyes to look into his grey.

As Hermione looked into the grey irises, she saw they were not the eyes of a gloating dominant. Instead they were filled with what seemed to be adoration and affection. He pulled her to him. She wrapped her hands around his neck as he picked her up and carried her into

the bedroom. He laid her down and planted a soft kiss on her mouth before positioning them both on their sides, him spooning her from behind.

Neither one of them said anything. After what seemed like forever, Draco finally spoke with a slight pleading to his voice. "Hermione, just submit to me. Submit to not only my words but to my intent. Perhaps I took this charade too far tonight, but I did it to make a point. I know you. I know you so well and as your Dominant I will anticipate your reactions as well as your needs. I had two very different scenarios planned out for tonight. You chose the path of defiance which led to where we ended up. If you had instead chosen to follow my intent as well as my words, we would have had a very different outcome.

Hermione rolled over and looked at him. "Draco, I've never been a submissive. I played a submissive role in the bedroom with Theo, but I was never his true submissive. When you instructed me to fix your dinner and then kneel beside the table, every impulse in my body screamed to defy you."

Draco looked at her knowingly. "I know that, Pet." He began rubbing up and down her arms.

"Then why did you command that of me? I thought I was agreeing to be your sexual submissive. You seem to be expecting more than that."

Draco thought before answering. "I don't want to label it. Our arrangement is going to be what it morphs into, but simply put? Yes, I want your complete submission when we are alone. You do as I say... period." He continued. 'I'll reward your obedience and I'll punish your defiance.' He paused and then added, smiling. "I think now you have a better understanding of my creativity when it comes to punishments."

Hermione stared at him, contemplating this new path he was leading her down.

"Do this for me, Pet. It will please me... more than you can ever realize." His right hand was now rubbing her thigh and slowly moving up. He leaned into her and kissed her gently. He planted small and delicate kisses from her mouth to her cheek to her ear, where he whispered, "in return, I'll fuck you and spank you and bring you ecstasy you never imagined possible. I'll make you very happy, I promise."

Hermione closed her eyes as he whispered his delicious promise. She tilted her head, giving him more access to her neck as he planted more aggressive kisses along her skin. Her arousal was escalating as his hand began rubbing her over her panties. Her betraying hips rocked into him without her consent.

He whispered as he continued caressing her skin with his mouth. "What's your answer, Pet? Your body says yes, what does that infuriating mind of yours say?" She could tell he was smiling as he teased.

She smiled at him, mischievously and answered in a soft and sultry tone. "I'll try, Draco. But, if you push me too far, I'm going to turn you into a ferret."

Chapter 8

Thanks for reading and reviewing.

She smiled at him mischievously and replied in a soft and sultry tone. "I'll try, Draco. But, if you push me too far, I'm going to turn you into a ferret."

Her eyes sparkled as she laughed at Draco's pained expression.

Suddenly, he shifted and was on top of her, pinning her down with her hands above her head. "Hmmm, it seems you're not such a smart witch after all," He taunted with a twinkle in his eyes.

Playfully, she squirmed and struggled to get out from under him, pressing up against him, causing his gaze to darken. He shook his head, speaking in his teasing and sexy voice. "Nowhere to go, Miss Granger. No one to save you." He held her wrists with one hand and grabbed his wand with the other, waving his wand towards the head of the bed. She felt something soft wrap around her wrists, tying them together and fastening them to the head board with a single bind.

She stopped squirming as her heart started to race, unwilling to back down or look away from his dominant stare. He tilted his head as if studying her. "I like your feistiness, Granger." Demonstrating his control over her as well as her inability to stop him, he moved down her body at a tortuous pace. 'I even like your resistance,' he continued to goad, massaging her breasts over her dress none to gently. After a minute, she was responding most deliciously, writhing her hips, clearly wanting him to take things further. Not one to disappoint, he continued his descent. When he reached her hips, he lifted her skirt so that her knickers were on display. Pushing himself up to his knees, he straddled her legs as he proclaimed, "It gives me more reasons to do this."

She let out a squeal when his strong hands grabbed her hips, flipping her onto her stomach, her hands still fastened above her head. A hard slap came down on her bottom.

She felt him slide off the bed as his warm hands made quick work of ripping the cotton obstacle, leaving her bum on display. She barely stopped herself from scolding him for his disregard, realizing her protest would be no more than cannon fodder.

"So, back to the matter at hand," he chuckled as his hands massaged her bare globes. Wanting to call him out and tell him he was not as funny as he thought he was, she once again stopped herself, finding herself impressed with her own restraint.

As though he had read her mind, he prodded her. "It would probably be best if you restrained from any more... deviant, Gryffindor like retorts or behaviors this evening." While she couldn't see his face, she could plainly imagine the smirk on his face. She knew he was trying to goad her and it took every bit of her self-control not to fall for his trap.

"I count two infractions, Pet. Number one, going to Rita Skeeter before you and I had a proper discussion about the issue." His hand slowly rubbed up her right calf, behind her knee

to the top of her thigh. If not for the fact that she was turned on by the game at hand, she would have protested her “supposed” infraction. This was something she would certainly address later. But at this moment, the anticipation of another slap simply had her squirming with need.

“You have a gorgeous ass, Pet.” Once again, his hands were on her, kneading each cheek. “My hands have been wanting to become intimately acquainted with it for many years now.”

She was surprised when she heard him walk away from her. It sounded like he was opening a drawer. She tried to look behind her but couldn’t see anything. Her mind began to run away with thoughts of what he might be doing.

What he might be getting.

What he might be planning.

She heard him chuckle. “Nervous, Pet? Hmm, well... that’s unfortunate. But, you’ve only yourself to blame.” No longer playful or teasing, he asked, “What’s your safeword?”

“Red,” she whispered, with a shaky voice, full of anticipation.

Suddenly, a loud slap accompanied by a sharp sting on her right butt cheek caused her to screech out a short, sharp shriek in surprise.

Draco watched as her bottom developed a rosy shade of pink where the paddle had made contact on her pale, soft skin. The contrast was lovely. He ran his hand over the now pink skin, finding it radiated a low heat. *Hmm. Let’s turn it up a little.*

He moved his hand to her left butt cheek, where he began to massage as he said in a disappointed, yet slightly teasing tone, “Number two. Your behavior tonight... it was, while predictable, most disappointing.”

Hermione let out another squeak as a second slap of the paddle came down, this time on her left butt cheek and with a touch more sting than the first. Once again, his hand rubbed where the paddle had made contact. The skin was slightly more red and put off a bit more heat than the first strike. *Exquisite.*

Knowing he could easily get sidetracked from what he had planned, he resisted the desire to continue and with a flick of his wand, her wrists were released from their binds. “Climb off the bed, Pet. Take your dress off and place it on the chair.” He turned back to his dresser and opened a drawer.

Hermione quickly slid off the bed and did as instructed. She was standing by the bed in only her bra when he turned back from the dresser to face her. Hermione swallowed as she took him in. He was still shirtless with faded jeans. He was leaning against the dresser and was simply watching her, his eyes raking up and down her body.

Barely above a whisper, he said, “take off your bra and toss it next to your dress.” She watched as his eyes moved from her now exposed breasts back up to her own. She shivered and crossed her arms in front of her, starting to feel self-conscious all of a sudden.

Draco slowly shook his head. “Drop your arms. I want to see you.” Hermione let them fall to her sides and dipped her gaze as well, unable to meet his stare any longer. She noticed the

wooden paddle in his right hand. His left hand was holding something as well, but she couldn't quite make out what it was... *a riding crop, maybe?*

He placed whatever it was in his back pocket and then took a step forward, reaching his hand out to her. "Come along, Pet." She glanced from his hand to his face, finding firm expectation on his face. He was not to be disobeyed. She stepped towards him and lightly placed her hand in his. Giving her hand a small squeeze of reassurance, he led her into the dining room.

Hermione's jaw dropped. The table, which was the same table they had just dined on, was cleared of all food items. Instead, were several black, silk cords as well as what looked like leather wrist and ankle cuffs that had buckles. As they walked closer to the table she could see that the cuffs were lined with what looked like sheepskin.

Her wide, brown eyes looked from the table to him. He was in full Dom mode... his expression serious and intense, his posture tall and his eyes focused on her. "I told you I was going to spank you on the table, Pet. I never say I'm going to do something and not follow through. That's something you might want to remember." He gestured towards the table. "Climb up onto the table, lay in the middle and on your stomach and place your arms out to your sides."

Hermione looked at the table and bit her lip, a slight hesitation in her compliance as her mind raced with images and visions of what her immediate future beheld.

"I'm waiting."

She swallowed and cautiously stepped towards the table. She noticed a small step bench had been placed for her use and found it gave her the needed height to maneuver onto the table. She slowly lowered herself so that she was lying face down as he had instructed. Turning her head to her left so that she was facing him, she rested her right cheek on the table and spread her arms out as she let out a small sigh. She could feel the pounding of her heart reverberate against the cool, mahogany, wooden table.

"Very good, Pet," he praised as he gave her a small smile.

Hermione once again felt his warm hands on her skin. He lightly traced his fingers from her left buttock down her thigh and calf, before picking up the first cuff and clasping it around her left ankle. He moved his fingers under the cuff to be sure it wasn't too tight. Then he walked to her right side and did the same thing, tracing his fingers down her leg, lightly... teasingly, before placing the cuff over the other ankle.

Ten minutes later, Draco had her restrained to his liking. He slowly walked around the table, taking in the vision before him. The cuffs around her limbs were attached to the table with black cords. He waved his wand and whispered a transfiguration spell, causing the table to slowly change from a smooth, oval surface into a wooden cross. With another flick of his wand, the structure was upright, and Hermione found herself upright along with it. Small padded pegs appeared under her feet and Draco knelt behind her, helping her manipulate her feet onto them.

"These pegs will hold your weight, so you don't strain your wrists and ankles," he reassured her.

He stepped back and took in the sight before him. He couldn't help the wide smile as it spread across his face. He had practiced this transfiguration many times and had imagined many a restrained, submissive and beautiful witch tied to it... at his mercy. He had only dreamed it would ever be Hermione Granger. He walked towards her and rubbed her shoulders, then moved his hands down her back to her small waist, to her lower back and to her buttocks. He said softly, "This a St. Andrews Cross, Princess." He started planting soft kisses on her right shoulder. He whispered, 'I can't tell you how magnificent you look tied to it.' He then began kissing her left shoulder. "I can't tell you how many times I've imagined you in this very spot. My imagination didn't give you justice. You are... exquisite." He inhaled deeply and took a step back.

His words soothed her and took away some of her fear. She had never done anything like this and his reassurance gave her the confidence she needed to continue.

"You will save word if it becomes too much. Tell me your safe word."

"Red," Hermione barely whispered.

"Tell me why you are being punished."

Hermione tried to gather her thoughts to get the words out. "Because, because I spoke with Rita Skeeter before giving you a chance to explain your side of events and because I disobeyed... if not your words, your intention."

Draco chuckled. He could tell she was terrified, but he could also tell she was beyond aroused. Her skin was flushed and warm and her breathing was quick. He took a step towards her and whispered, "I'm going to spank you now, Miss Granger." Just to be sure she was ok, he rubbed her bottom and slowly moved his hands between her legs where he found she was more than aroused. She was practically dripping with moisture.

Hermione was intoxicated with arousal. Her hands and ankles were fastened securely to the cross, but the cuffs were very soft and comfortable. Her feet were supporting her weight on the cushioned pegs and she didn't feel any strain to her back or legs. The only discomfort she felt was not knowing what would happen next. She had never imagined she would be in this particular setting, not with Theo and certainly not with Draco Malfoy. Yet, she couldn't deny the thrill of adrenaline, arousal and anticipation that was coursing through her. Her body was flush against the cross and with her head turned she could barely make out Draco with her peripheral vision.

She saw a blur of movement and then felt the slap of the paddle against her bottom. She let out a grunt as a second slap hit next to where the first one had landed. He continued to spank her and paused after the sixth hit. He padded close behind her and as he rubbed her now tender skin, he whispered, "this is what happens when you misbehave, Pet. I get the joy of spanking your delectable bottom." He pulled her hair aside and kissed her neck. "Those were warm up. Now come the real thing."

Hermione's breath hitched at his words. In an instant he had moved back, and she felt a sharp sting to her left buttock, followed immediately by one on her right.

It hurt, there was no denying it.

All the other spankings... his hand, his belt and his paddle had been nothing compared to this.

Yet, she had no desire to safe word. Her arousal continued to build the more he spanked her. The stinging slaps rained down on her without hesitation and without mercy. They landed on her buttocks and the junctions of her thighs and her buttocks, but never in the exact same spot. *How could pain feel so good?* Theo had spanked her, but usually only with his hand and never hard. This was completely different. She felt adventurous, she felt naughty and she felt more alive than she had in years.

Draco couldn't take it anymore. He had spanked her six times with the paddle and then eight times with the crop. She didn't cry, and she didn't safe word.

He had to have her.

To taste her.

To show her how good he could make her feel.

He dropped the crop and fell to his knees behind her, kissing the red, hot skin of her tender bottom. He spread her open and pressed his face into her, breathing in her arousal. He ran his tongue along her folds and crevices, causing her to mewl with need.

He unbuckled the cuffs on her ankles and then stood wrapping his left arm around her waist securely as he reached above him to unbuckle first her right wrist and then her left. He held her tight as she collapsed back into him.

Grabbing his wand out of his pocket, he uttered a spell and the cross immediately transfigured back into the oval table of earlier. He pulled her back several feet as the table came to a horizontal position again, no evidence of its earlier occupation except for the cuffs and black cord which were still attached to its legs.

"Bend over the table... now." He demanded. His voice impatient and full of urgency.

Hermione quickly stepped towards the table and leaned over it. He was on her instantly. His right hand grabbed the back of her head, forcing it down and her upper body flush against the table. The sound of a zipper was all she heard as he pushed her feet further apart and slid into her.

After a deep exhale, he slowly started to move in and out of her. As he felt his control returning he began to pump at a quicker pace. He could feel her sleeve tightening and knew she was close to her own release. "Don't come yet, witch," he demanded wanting her to climax with him instead of before him. He was so close. After a few strokes, he bent his knees and adjusted his angle so that his angle elicited loud grunts and snarls from the witch under him. Knowing her release would facilitate his own, he didn't stop her when he felt the flutter of her impending orgasm. "Come for me, Pet," he grunted as he continued his assault.

His words were her undoing. As she yelled out in bliss and her walls clamped down on him, he growled as he was overcome with his own ecstasy, tensing as waves of pleasure shot through him. After a moment, he collapsed onto her back, drawing in large mouthfuls of air as the world around him came back into focus.

Hermione felt her breathing slowly come back to normal and she let out a sigh of regret as he eased himself out of and off her. She had loved everything he delivered... from being restrained and spanked to being taken with such need and force.

"Can you stand?" He asked her, in a soft and nurturing tone.

She slowly pushed herself up and stood next to him. She was surprised to see his jeans were still on him.

'Can you walk?' He asked, with the same soft, concerned tone.

She nodded, not quite able to find her voice.

"Come," he commanded as he reached his hand out to her. She took it without hesitation. He led her back to the master bathroom, turned the light on as they entered. He placed his hands on her shoulders.

"Stay right there," he whispered before stepping behind her and assessing her bottom. She had eight distinguishable red marks on her buttocks and the tops of her thighs. He would have to clear that up before he took her home.

He waved his wand at the tub and it rapidly filled with steaming water. "I'm going to place a cooling charm over your bum so the hot water doesn't hurt your tender skin." Hermione's bottom suddenly felt tingly. "Step into the tub, Pet. I'm going to wash you."

Before she could stop herself, the words came out of her mouth. "Draco, I'm perfectly capable..."

He cut her off, his tone once again demanding, controlling and not to be argued with. "Granger, are you seriously going to disobey me? What were the two simple rules I told you were to be followed at all times when we are alone. Answer me."

Hermione stared at him as her mind thought back to earlier. "Umm, to not speak unless given permission to speak and to do as you say."

Draco sighed and said quietly, his tone softer. "We don't have time for another spanking and frankly I don't think your bottom could take it, but if you disobey me again tonight, I *will* punish you, Pet." He watched her for a minute. "Do you understand?"

She nodded.

"Not good enough. Answer me properly."

She looked him in the eyes. Hermione was a bit of a loss. With Theo, her submission always ended when the sex was over. But with Draco, he obviously took things further. She rather liked it. "Yes, sir."

He smirked. "Much better." He leaned in and kissed her delicately on the mouth. "You are mine, Pet. That means you are mine to use, but you are also mine to take care of and I plan to take very good care of you."

He gestured towards the tub and Hermione slowly lowered herself into it and found it was easily big enough for four people. She was expecting her bottom to hurt as she slid into the hot water, but Draco's cooling charm did the trick and all she felt was caressing warmth on

her muscles. She felt tension escape her which she hadn't even known she was harboring. Leaning back in the huge tub, she watched as he slipped off his jeans and eased into the opposite side of the tub so that he was facing her. Neither said anything as they seemed to mutually enjoy the quiet reflection of what had just transpired between them.

Suddenly a thought, followed by a wonderful visual came into his mind. He gave her a teasing smile and whispered seductively. "Since you were so eager to point out that you are capable of washing yourself, I think I'll watch you do just that."

Hermione gave him a slightly confused look. He handed her a clean flannel and a bar of verbenia soap. He spoke softly, but commandingly. "Lather up the washcloth, Pet."

Hermione easily understood where this was going and couldn't deny the small thrum of excitement that was stirring in her gut. She knew this was going to be her hands doing his bidding. She did not take her knowing eyes off him as she dipped the cloth and the soap into the water and then rubbed the two together, causing creamy suds to build.

He grinned, mischievously. "Good girl. You can start by washing your neck... slowly."

Hermione did not falter her gaze as she massaged her skin with the sudsy fabric. His focus, however, darted back and forth between her own and the foamy water that dripped from her long neck and then ran down her decollete to her cleavage. He swallowed heavily as a few suds caressingly moved over the swell of her breasts.

In a shaky voice he added, "Continue washing down your chest. I want to see you wash your tits with particular care." He was grinning widely at her now and she rolled her eyes. It was all she could manage not to splash him for being such an adolescent. But she couldn't deny that this *was* kind of hot. She gave him a small, flirtatious smile in return and lathered up the flannel once again.

Deciding to make it good, she traced the cloth from her neck to her upper chest slowly, teasingly... drawing it out so as not to get to where he wanted her hands to be.

Just before reaching his desired destination, she lathered up the flannel once again and then put on a bit of a show. She massaged her breasts thoroughly, occasionally giving her nipples extra attention. His arousal was evidenced by darkening and dilating pupils as well as a quickened rate of breathing. She loved that she could get this response out of him and kept her focus on his telling gaze. However, his eyes were not on hers. They were quite enthralled with her hand's ministrations.

In a gruff voice he demanded, "sit on the edge of the tub and wash your stomach, Pet."

She used her arms to lift herself up and sat facing him, leaving her feet and calves the only parts of her still in the water. Her legs slightly spread, she leaned forward and dipped the cloth into the water before soaping it up again and washing under her breasts and down to her taut stomach. His vision trailed the dripping water as it journeyed down between her legs.

His mouth fell open slightly and his eyes moved hungrily back and forth between her eyes and her thighs. She followed his wordless command and spread her legs wider as she began to wash the sudsy cloth over her core. His Adam's apple bobbed up and down and he swallowed roughly before his right hand began to stroke his hardness while watching her.

His voice came out choked as he commanded, “drop the cloth and use your hands.” Hermione was getting off on how turned on he was and in turn she found herself becoming heady with her own need. She dropped the cloth and began rubbing both her hands over herself, becoming more and more aroused. She closed her eyes focused her attentions where it felt best.

Suddenly a wave of water went over the side of the tub as he shot forward and pushed her hands out of the way before greedily burying his face into her. She collapsed back on her elbows as he feasted on her, running his tongue up and down, taking her sensitive nub in his mouth, sucking and flicking it with skill and precision. Hermione let out a loud moan as her orgasm crashed down on her... hard and fast.

Draco lifted himself onto his knees, grabbing her legs and spreading them wide as he pulled her hips closer. He slid into her quickly, moving fast... in and out... pounding... pummeling. She remained on her elbows, her neck limp as her head fell back. He felt so good... filling her, claiming her. Just as her elbows were starting to hurt he let out a loud savage groan as he came.

Both of their hearts were ponding and after a minute he slid away from her and stood. He reached his hand out to her and she took it, standing and following him into the shower. Within seconds the streaming water was hot. “Let’s rinse you off,” he whispered, peppering her neck with soft kisses as the water cascaded over them both.

Twenty minutes later, Hermione was laying on her stomach on his bed. He was rubbing lotion onto her bottom and thighs. He had charmed her skin to make the red marks not show, but the charm did nothing for the tenderness. The combination of the hot bath, cooling charm and now him rubbing lotion on her bottom was making her very sleepy.

He stood up and spoke with regret in his voice. “Come along, Pet. Let’s get you dressed and home. It’s almost ten.”

Hermione sighed as she stood and started to dress. She looked at him expectantly and he gave her a questioning look.

She rolled her eyes, and smirked. “Permission to speak, sir”, she said batting her eyelashes in an over exaggerated way.

He rolled his eyes back at her. “Yes, yes... by all means... speak, Granger.”

“I would like to point out that I may be your submissive but that doesn’t mean you can stop me from doing my job. You aren’t going to stop me from helping Moxie... even if that means coming after Malfoy Enterprises. I also need to be able to meet with you privately to discuss her case and I will not be following your rules when those meetings happen. Just because we’re alone won’t necessarily mean I’m your submissive in that instance.”

He studied her, clearly thinking about what she was saying. “Fine... when we are meeting for the purpose of your client...or other strictly professional reasons, I will not expect you to behave as my submissive. However, it doesn’t necessarily mean we can’t combine the two. Let’s see how it goes, what comes natural.”

Hermione shook her head. “Fine, but I’m warning you, if you try to cross that line and try to manipulate me and my handling of Moxie’s case, you will be sorely disappointed. This

Dominant/submissive agreement we have with each other, will not have any influence over my professional world, Malfoy.”

Draco sighed with exasperation. “Fine, I get it, I get it. I never thought it would.” Hermione started to slip on her sandals. He added, barely loud enough for her to hear, “but, I can dare to hope.”

She stood up, shaking her head at him, giving him a stern look in warning.

He smiled, flirtatiously. “Easy, my beautiful cub. I understand... no mixing up work with pleasure.” He pulled her to him and kissed her. “So, tomorrow. Two o’clock sharp. Be at my office and don’t be late.”

She looked up at him. “I need to discuss Moxie’s case with you. So, I will be there at two, but not as your submissive.”

Draco didn’t like that plan. “I tell you what, have a business lunch with me at one to discuss Moxie and then be in my office at two for... other activities.”

Hermione considered his proposal. “Fine. Business first and then... pleasure.” She gave him a small smile.

Draco apparated with her to the hallway outside her flat. “I’ll see you tomorrow.” He gave her a quick kiss on the cheek and Apparated away.

Hermione turned to her door, guilt overcoming as she looked at it. She had no idea if Theo would be home yet or not. Her excuse for being out so late ready to go, she entered the flat. It was dark. She made her way back to the bedroom and found their bed was empty and unslept in. Theo was still out. She breathed a sigh of relief as she kicked off her shoes and changed into her nightgown.

She climbed into bed and looked at the clock. It was ten-thirty pm and she was exhausted. She closed her eyes and easily drifted off to sleep, dreaming of crosses and horses and summer fields of verberna.

Chapter 9

Thanks to all who reviewed, fav'd and followed! Hope you like this chapter :)

Hermione opened her eyes and looked at the clock on her bedside table. It was two twenty-two in the morning and Theo was still not home. She had slept hard for a bit but had been restless the last hour. In typical Hermione fashion, her mind began to run away with worrisome thoughts of Theo's whereabouts. The restaurants and bars are all closed by this hour and didn't he say they were going to a pub? He should be home by now. She rolled onto her back and looked up at the ceiling as her mind ran away with her. What if he was in trouble? What if he was too drunk to Apparate home? What if he had tried to Apparate and had splinched himself! He could be Merlin knows where, bleeding to death... or worse, already dead!

Castigating herself for jumping to Gryffindor-like conclusions, she inhaled a deep cleansing breath and told herself to calm down. It was likely that Theo was at Mick's or one of the other wizard's homes drinking and had lost track of time. She closed her eyes, willing sleep to overtake her.

However, her mind wouldn't cooperate, and she found her thoughts jumping from work to her upcoming anniversary to her parents. Recently, they had told her all about cell phones and how wonderful they were. Perhaps she should get them for herself and Theo. She quickly dismissed that idea. More than likely they wouldn't work in the wizarding environment... and besides, that would mean she would always be reachable as well, which given her new circumstances, could prove to be inconvenient. A flood of guilt washed over her and her logic screamed at her. *This can't continue, Hermione. You need to end it... now!*

Glancing back at the clock, her thoughts moved back to Theo. It was extremely inconsiderate of him to be out this late on a work night. He should know she would start to worry when it got past one in the morning! When she heard the sound of the front door opening, relief coursed through her. Thank Merlin. She leaned over to turn the lamp on and pushed herself up to sit against the headboard.

When Theo walked into the bedroom, she was taken aback by his disheveled appearance. His hair was a mess and his shirt wrinkled.

Surprise was etched on the planes of his face when he spotted her... awake... seemingly waiting for him. "Hey Babe, what are you doing still up?" He started emptying his pockets onto his bedside stand.

"I... I couldn't sleep. Where did you go? The bars closed over an hour ago. I was starting to worry." She tried to sound conversational and not like the nagging wife she swore she would never become.

He started to unbutton his shirt as he gave her a small smile. "I'm sorry, Babe. I told you not to wait up." He tossed his shirt into the dirty laundry basket beside the closet. "We went to

Mick's after the pub closed and continued drinking at his place." He sat on the edge of the bed with his back to her as he started to untie his shoes.

"Theo! What happened to your back? You've got red marks... are those scratches?" She quickly jumped across the bed to get a better look, but he stood and turned to face her.

He shook his head and said dismissively, "It's nothing... we uh, we were rough housing at Mick's and a table busted apart and got me in the back." He looked shamefaced and continued, 'You would think we were a bunch of teenagers and not grown men!' He slipped out of his jeans. "I'm gonna take a quick shower." With that he disappeared into the bathroom leaving a perplexed Hermione staring at the door behind him.

Hermione collapsed back on the bed and looked up at the ceiling. It was as she had told herself. He was fine, and she had been worrying for nothing. She looked across the room and saw he had missed the dirty laundry basket completely. His pants, shirt, socks and underwear were all scattered around on the floor surrounding it. She sighed heavily and climbed out of bed. As she picked up his clothes and she held his shirt, it surprised her that his shirt was intact... no tears, or dirt or anything. It was wrinkled, but it seemed his shirt fared fine whereas his skin took a beating. She tossed the clothes into the basket and climbed back in bed pondering. More than likely one of his friends had charmed his shirt and mended it. It was odd, though. Theo's work friends from the WLP had always seemed so mild mannered. It was surprising they would get so drunk as to break a table. She was suddenly very tired... too tired to think about anything. Theo was home and he was safe. She was asleep within minutes.

Friday

Hermione left the flat at 8:15 am after kissing her husband on the cheek and wishing him a good day. She apparated to work and promptly noted the empty reception desk in front of her. Lizzy was on vacation today, so Hermione was on her own. She walked into her office sat at her desk and started reading through the owl posts which had been delivered since the day before. She shook her head in dismay as she read through some of the letters and applications. *Seriously, why would I care about or want to put my efforts into lobbying for witches and wizards to be able to use magical watering devices in their muggle neighborhood yards and gardens!* She tossed that letter into the 'politely decline' bin and opened the next letter.

Before she knew it, most of the morning had flown by. It was already eleven-thirty in the morning and she had barely accomplished anything. She acknowledged to herself that Lizzy needed a raise. She had forgotten how much Lizzy really did around that office until now. She would make arrangements with Gringotts after her afternoon *meeting* with Draco.

She leaned back in her chair as her thoughts drifted to Draco and their arrangement. While the night before she had been determined to end their affair, in the light of day she felt differently. He filled a need that Theo wasn't meeting and as reckless as it was, she wasn't ready to give Draco up. However, they needed to set some more rules and boundaries. She had been curious about BDSM relationships and had done a lot of research a few years ago. She knew about contracts and hard and soft limits and was beginning to wonder if that was a direction she should propose to Draco. Since he was taking this whole Dominance and submission thing so much further than what she had originally thought, perhaps they needed to set some clear boundaries. For instance, she would not allow him to interfere in any way

with her profession. She had discussed it with him briefly the night before, but felt she needed to take that discussion a little further to be sure he really understood.

At noon an owl arrived and tapped on her window. This was clearly a personal message because the owl did not leave its delivery in the designated work post basket. She walked over to the window and opened it, watching as the bird flew in and landed on her desk. She untied the letter from its leg before opening her desk drawer and removing two treats. The owl ate them greedily and then flew off through the window.

She sat down as she read the note. *"I made a reservation at 'Oscars Bistro' for 1pm. See you there. Don't be late."*

Hermione tossed the note in the trash, feeling a touch irritated. *As if I wouldn't be on time.* Hermione was always punctual and didn't appreciate his tone. Seeing as the lunch is a business lunch, she didn't have to do what he said. Perhaps she would be late after all. She could even change the reservation and owl him back telling him to meet her somewhere else. After a minute she decided that this time she wouldn't be difficult. But going forward, business meetings would not be dictated and controlled by him. It set a bad precedent.

She spent the next forty-five minutes prioritizing the owl posts that she had an interest in. When it was coming up on time to leave, she crossed the room to her mirror and took in her reflection. She was wearing a light grey muggle suit with a pale, pale pink silk blouse. The skirt was a tight, pencil design that came to just above her knees. Her grey heels matched perfectly, and her hair was swept up into a French knot. She was quite pleased with how she looked. She was going for sexy and hoped she was pulling it off. Draco was a handful and she needed to use every tool she had against him for their business meeting. Besides, if he found himself aroused during their business lunch, it would serve to make their following two o'clock encounter that much more... well, more. She smiled at herself as she touched up her makeup. She was looking forward to both their meetings, but her pulse raced when she thought about his hands on her again.

Draco arrived at the bistro a little early so that he could be sure they received a good table, preferably one in a hidden corner where they would have more privacy. Their lunch date may be about business, but he hoped to spice it up a little before taking her back to his office at two. He was not disappointed when he got to the restaurant. They had reserved a perfect table in the back corner of the small restaurant.

He was looking over the menu when he spotted her. His jaw slackened with desire as he watched the Maître 'd lead her back towards their table. She was simply stunning. He noticed the other wizards checking her out as she walked by. *That's right fella's and she's mine.* He stood up when she approached the table

He spoke softly. "You look lovely, Pet."

She cocked her eye at him. "I'm not your pet," she stated firmly. Then she gave him a small smile and continued, "at least not for another hour." They sat across from each other with small knowing smiles. Each anxious for the hour to pass quickly.

Before he could comment, the waiter walked up and reviewed the specials. They both ordered the fish du jour and Draco ordered a bottle of Sancerre for them to share.

After the waiter walked away Hermione gave him a disapproving look. "I don't think we should be drinking wine, Draco. This is a work meeting after all."

He replied, dismissively. "Wine is very common in the world of executive lunches, Granger."

"Well, just so long as you realize I'm not going to go all soft on you because you give me a couple drinks. I owe it to Moxie to get to the bottom of the... injustice she has endured."

Draco rolled his eyes. "Fine, let's just get to it shall we?"

Just then the sommelier approached the table and poured a taste of the wine for Draco. Draco swirled, sniffed and sipped the wine before nodding his approval. The sommelier then filled their glasses and walked away.

Hermione got straight to the point. "Draco, why didn't Malfoy Enterprises hire Moxie?"

"Because she wasn't right for the job." He replied matter of factly.

"Why?" Hermione pressed.

He sighed heavily. "I'm going to tell you, but this is not for you to repeat to Rita Skeeter or anyone else for that matter." He gave her a stern, questioning look.

She nodded for him to continue.

He sipped his wine. "All potential new hires who are close to being selected go through a peer interview. She scored low on that phase of the process. When she was asked questions she was dismissive, self-righteous, and condescending to the staff whom she would be supervising. They were very put off by her and felt she would be an unapproachable supervisor. Her resume was impressive but her interpersonal skills were very poor."

Hermione sipped her wine and leaned back in her chair, contemplating what he said. "So, it's not because she was a *female* goblin?"

Draco shook his head and replied adamantly, "absolutely not!"

"Why didn't George just tell me this on day one?"

With a hint of impatience, he replied, "Because it's against company policy to disclose that information. We consider it confidential. It's to protect Moxie as much as us."

Hermione looked at him skeptically. "Are you telling me the truth?"

Draco rolled his eyes. "Do you think I'd *lie* to you?"

Hermione scoffed. "To protect Malfoy Enterprises? Absolutely!"

Draco leaned forward and looked her in the eyes piercingly as he said, authoritatively, "Here's the simple truth, Granger. ME has the right to hire whomever we want and did not break any laws in our hiring process. If you want to lobby for equal rights and equal opportunity rights for goblins, centaurs or... garden gnomes for that matter... go for it. Only don't drag Malfoy Enterprises through the mud in the process. I won't stand by and let you do that. We did nothing wrong and I will come at you with wands blazing if you go after my company." He continued to stare at her as his threat sunk in.

Just then the waiter approached with their meals.

Hermione wasn't sure if she believed Draco about why Moxie wasn't hired. But one thing she did learn was that Draco wasn't going to take this lying down. It was clear he would fight her if it came down to it. She also realized that executive Draco and Dominant Draco were very closely related, and she was beginning feel a little flushed. She took another sip of her wine.

They didn't speak for a couple minutes as they began to eat. She needed to discuss their 'arrangement' and felt that now was a good time. She swallowed her bite of fish and looked up at him to find he was watching her closely.

"You look like you have something to say, Granger. Spit it out." He said with a slight smirk.

She bit her lip and leaned back in her chair. "Well, actually... I wanted to discuss... us, or our arrangement."

Draco's whole demeanor changed. His eyes twinkled, and he gave her a sexy smile. "Continue," he instructed with a soft voice.

She replied in a soft tone. "Well firstly, I want to reiterate my point from last night. My work and my job will not be impacted in any way by... us." After a short pause she continued. "And to that point, you do not have the right to punish me for work related issues either... therefore, you were out of line for punishing me because I met with Rita Skeeter." She watched him as he paused eating and put his fork down.

After a minute he said, in a quiet and soft tone that matched her own, "I'll concede that point to you, Pet. Furthermore, going forward I will not punish... or reward you for that matter, for any work-related reasons." He smiled, mischievously, leaning towards her, his eyes gazing into hers... "however, as your Dominant, I don't necessarily *need* a reason for my actions. It is my right, as your Dominant, to spank, fuck, tease, torture or... do *whatever* I want to you and it's your job as my submissive, to take it."

Hermione smirked back at him, "well, you have led me very nicely to my next point. You and I have not discussed limits. While I've never been in an actual D/s relationship, I *have* researched them. I know about contracts and limits. You can do no more to me than I allow."

Draco cocked an eyebrow and said in a surprised tone of voice. "You want to sign a D/s contract with me? You think that's necessary?"

She tilted her head, "well... maybe. It's not that I feel we need a contract, but I do think you need to know what my limits are. I think we need to at least discuss them." She took another sip of wine, emptying her glass. Draco refilled it.

He watched her for a minute. "Hmm, I think you're right, Pet. I think we should spend the rest of lunch and possibly the afternoon exploring just that." A deviant and flirtatious grin slowly crept over his face.

Chapter 10

Thanks for all the reviews! Please keep them coming!

“Hmmm, I think you’re right, Pet. I think we should spend the rest of lunch and possibly the afternoon exploring just that.” A deviant, flirtatious grin slowly crept over his face.

She watched him as he took a bite of food and asked a question that had been on her mind. “Have you ever been in a D/s relationship before?”

His mouth froze mid-chew as his brow furrowed. After a few seconds, he slowly started to chew again with a look on his face like he wasn’t sure how to answer. He put his fork down and took a sip of wine. “Well, not a formal D/s relationship per say, but before I married Astoria I had experiences with submissive witches. I’ve always had a Dominant streak.”

Hermione thought about that. “You married Astoria right after Hogwarts. Does that mean you were sexually Dominant while at school?”

Draco paused before answering and then gave her a look of caution. “This is not for you to discuss, with anyone. Are we clear?”

Hermione nodded. “Crystal. As far as I’m concerned, everything we discuss as it pertains to our... arrangement, is private and not to be shared.”

He nodded. “I really hate to bring this up. But... you asked.” He took another swallow of wine. “Rodolphus... he pretty much taught me how to spank witches without hurting them, or I should say, without injuring them. One day I walked in on him... punishing Bella.”

“What?” Hermione demanded in a shocked whisper, her mouth falling open.

He shook his head. “They didn’t see me, so I watched... just for a little while. He had her hog tied with a gag in her mouth as he pummeled her with what looked like a whip.” His eyes got a far-away look as he remembered, his voice growing very soft. ‘I was so shocked. For a minute I thought he was really punishing her. I even wondered if he was doing it on the Dark Lords orders.’ Draco shook his head and sighed. But the way she was moaning and reacting made it clear she was enjoying every minute of it. “He took a swallow of wine.” I couldn’t stop thinking about it. A few days later, I confided in him my Dominant urges and tendencies.”

“Sooo, was Bellatrix... submissive?” It made her ill to say the evil witch’s name, but Hermione was genuinely curious.

Draco gave her a knowing look. “I’m sorry... I know you hate hearing her name or thinking about that time... but yes. She was submissive, and she was into it hardcore. As much as she loved to torture, she loved to be tortured. Rodolphus was more than happy to oblige her.” Draco really didn’t want to start talking about that awful time in his life and he certainly didn’t want to upset Hermione. “I’m sorry... let’s just talk about something else.”

Hermione shook her head. “No, I want to know. It’s ok, Draco.” She reached out and touched his hand, briefly. “Really.” She gave him a small smile, encouraging him to continue.

Draco sighed heavily. “He taught me a great deal, Granger. He taught me about instruments used for pleasure and pain as well as instruments used for torture. He knew witches, other than Bella, who were experienced submissives and they agreed to submit to me for practice and training. I learned how to use belts, floggers, whips, canes, paddles, crops... you name it, I’ve probably tried it. He also taught me about some other devices as well. Things like clamps, cuffs, bars, plugs... even needles and knives. I guess you could say I had a thorough introduction.”

Hermione was stunned. She stared at him, shock evident by her expression. “Wow,” she whispered. She cringed at the thought of needles and knives and was now determined they would need a limits list. There was no way she was going to let him touch her with anything sharp.

He sighed heavily and paused before continuing. “Yeah, It was quite an... education.” He moved the food around on his plate as he spoke. “But, I was only able to do it when I was home from school, over breaks and holidays. After the war ended, well you know what I went through... all the interrogations and the trials. When it was all over, I was so relieved. I just wanted to put all that behind me. I associated my dominance and training with that time and tried to forget about it.”

A small, genuine smile crept over his face. “Astoria was good for me in that regard. At least in the beginning.” He let out a big sigh. ‘But, over time my urges and desires returned.’ He looked her in the eyes and said softly, “And you, my Pet... You were the witch I wanted.” He gave her a mischievous grin. “Oh, how I used to imagine you... restrained and at my mercy. I told you how jealous I was of Theo.”

Hermione felt warmth spread up her neck to her face. She shifted in her seat and looked away. Thinking about his past, she became lost in visions of him with Rodolphus, spanking witches and doing Merlin knows what else to them. After a minute or so, she responded, looking him in the eyes once again. “So, you said Astoria never... submitted to you?”

He replied, barely above a whisper. “No, she wasn’t mentally or emotionally tough enough to be a submissive. She was... fragile. But I really grew to love her... very much. I still love her. But she didn’t make me happy as a wife and I certainly didn’t make her happy as a husband. She needed too much nurturing, constant reassurance, constant attention. She has needs I just can’t meet. After 10 years, I realized it was time to end it. She’s much better off now. We’re actually still quite close. I hope we always will be.”

Hermione was touched with emotion as she saw in his eyes that he meant what he said. With a slight shake of his head, he said. “Well, enough of that. I’d much rather be discussing your limits.” He looked at his watch and a grin crept over his face... ‘Ahh... look at that.’ He peeked up at her, continuing to smile. “Two o’clock. Which means you’re mine now.” He sat up straight and waived at the waiter. “Check, please.”

Five minutes later they Apparated into the lobby of Malfoy Enterprises. He led her into the executive elevator. As the doors closed and the lift began its ascent, he looked straight ahead as he spoke. “When we get to my office, you will let your hair down. You will then walk to the middle of the room and face my desk to await further instruction.”

As soon as the doors opened, Draco gestured for her to lead the way. He enjoyed walking behind her... admiring the view.

As they approached his office, the desk where his secretary normally sat was empty. It seemed they were the only ones in the executive suite. He opened the door for her, following behind as she entered. He walked past her and to his desk as she pulled the pins out of her hair and approached the middle of the room. Draco took off his jacket and draped it over the back of his chair before removing his cuff links and rolling up his sleeves. He stepped around to the front of his desk and sat on the corner, watching her.

After a minute, he broke the silence. His look predatory... assessing. "So, you want to talk limits."

She nodded and replied softly, "Yes... sir."

He continued to watch her. In a quiet and calm voice, he said, "Well, first, I'd like a brief overview of your... experiences." His eyes raked up and down her form. "Take off your jacket, Pet."

Hermione slipped it off. He slowly walked over and took it from her. He continued to stand in front of her, peering down at her. "Don't look me in the eyes, Pet. That's a privilege and you will have to earn it."

Hermione dropped her gaze so that she was looking at his shirt.

He turned and walked away from her, draping her jacket over the sectional sofa. He then turned back to her. "Come sit on the sofa."

Hermione walked over to him and sat on the sofa. He sat across from her, facing her, much like he had the last time she was in his office. "I would like to hear about your... submissive experiences and then we will discuss limits. You are free to look at me and speak conversationally the rest of today. However, you will remain respectful and follow any instructions I give you. Do you understand?"

Hermione swallowed. "Yes, sir. I understand."

He leaned back in his chair and continued to watch her as he softly commanded, "Unbutton one button from your blouse."

Her blouse had already had the first two buttons undone. It now gaped open more significantly after she followed his instruction.

"So, tell me... did you ever have any type of sexually submissive experiences before Theo?"

Hermione shook her head, "no, he was the only one."

He tilted his head. "Really? Hmm. Well, did you have submissive fantasies or desires before him?"

Hermione felt her cheeks flush with warmth as she remembered some of her earliest daydreams. After a moment, she responded. "I had thoughts, desires... but I never voiced them or pursued them. I... I didn't understand the urges and I dismissed them, feeling they were a sign of weakness. I felt like something was wrong with me."

“Run your hand, lightly down your chest, over your blouse and stimulate your right nipple.”

Hermione’s pulse quickened. Her nipple pebbled at her touch. She stroked it lightly, awaiting further instruction.

His eyes stayed on her hand as he asked, “So, you say you had thoughts. What kind of thoughts? What were you doing when they would pop into your mind?”

His gaze met hers, his steel grey orbs demanding an answer.

Hermione didn’t anticipate this line of questioning and contemplated lying, but he had been honest with her. She took a breath and replied in a soft and controlled tone, mirroring his own. “Well, after the war... Ron and I, we started dating. When we started... having sex, he was... very gentle. I used to wish he would be more... aggressive. I started to become more aggressive towards him... hoping he would follow my lead.”

Draco continued watching her intensely. “Move your hand to your other nipple and stimulate it.”

Hermione began touching her already hardened left peak.

“When you say you wanted him to be aggressive... what specifically did you desire?”

She paused before answering. “I wanted him to... take control. I didn’t know what a dominant was back then. But that was what I wanted him to be. I wanted him to... this sounds terrible, but... force me, take me.”

Draco’s gaze was becoming more heated. He still spoke in a soft, but demanding voice. “Unbutton the rest of your blouse and untuck it from your skirt.”

Hermione was feeling warm all over. After she finished unbuttoning and untucking her blouse, he further instructed her, “Massage your breasts over your bra.”

His focus moved from her hands to her face. “So, how long did you stay in this... unsatisfying sexual relationship.”

She continued massaging herself. “For almost a year.”

Draco leaned forward, resting his elbows on his knees. “Take off your blouse, Pet.”

After a shimmer of a pause he continued, “Let’s fast forward to Theo.” When her top was no longer on her, he asked, “So, tell me about your first sexually submissive experience.”

Hermione thought back to her third date with Theo. She swallowed. “We had gone to dinner and we had just gotten back to my flat.” She got a small smile on her face. ‘We walked in my front door and he just... pushed me against the wall... demanded my compliance.’ She reflected for a few seconds and continued. “It was like he was a different person. He became what I had fantasized about... a man in control. He didn’t ask to kiss me, and he wasn’t gentle. He cast a spell, which forced my hands against the wall over my head.” Her eyes became a bit glazed. “I couldn’t move them. Then he... ripped my blouse in his urgency to... well, he took me... right there, against the wall. He started whispering commands. He told me to close my eyes... so I did. He told me to wrap my legs around him... so I did. He told me to... well, let’s just say from then on, I did what he told me to do.” Hermione had been staring

out the glass wall as she spoke but now turned her gaze back to Draco. "It was so satisfying... it felt like we were made for each other." She let out a large huff of air. "Of course, his dominance ended as soon as we finished having sex. It in no way spilled into any part our relationship outside of sex."

Draco contemplated her, not saying anything. After a minute or so, he said, "take of your bra and stand up."

Hermione was aroused... beyond aroused. She could feel her pulse was quick and she felt very warm. She stood up, slowly, as she slipped her bra off. He continued to sit, simply watching her.

"Turn around, so that your back is to me." After she complied, he continued. "Slowly unzip your skirt."

Hermione reached behind her and as she moved the zipper, she could feel his eyes on her.

His voice was slightly gruff with arousal and was barely above a whisper. "Slide your skirt off, and let it pool at your feet."

After her skirt fell to the floor, he added, "Slide your panties down your legs and leave them at your feet with your skirt." After following his command, she was left standing naked except for thigh high stockings and grey high heels. She still had her back to him. "Carefully step out of your pooled clothing and bend over, at your hips, to pick them up."

When she bent over to grab them, she heard his sharp intake of air.

"Toss your clothes on the sofa in front of you and turn around," he growled, the air suddenly thick with desire.

After she turned, his eyes moved up and down her form and then went back to her brown irises. "Come stand in front of me."

Hermione slowly approached him and stopped when she was a foot in front of his chair.

"Kneel at my feet, Pet."

Hermione slowly went down on her knees in front of him.

He contemplated her for a minute. "Hmm, you look... quite lovely." He grinned. "So, tell me... do you like kneeling before me?"

Hermione decided to be honest. "Not particularly."

He laughed and then teased, "That's a shame. I think I am quite fond of it." He reached out and gently stroked her cheek with the back of his hand. "So, let's discuss your limits... shall we?"

Chapter 11

Thanks for reading and reviewing! Once again, I own none of this. The Harry Potter universe belongs to JKR.

He reached out and gently stroked her cheek with the back of his hand. “So, let’s discuss your limits... shall we?” He watched her closely. He knew she was aroused, just as he was. But he wanted to be anything other than predictable, hence his decision not to touch her sexually... at least not yet.

He waved his wand and a folder and quill flew out of his desk, landing on his lap. Glancing over the papers inside, he could see out of the corner of his eye she was restless and uncomfortable. It amused him, he wouldn’t deny it. There was something very gratifying about having Hermione Granger kneeling at his feet; doing it by her free will simply because he commanded it despite her obvious frustration with the demand. But Draco was not about to push her but so far. Entering into a contract negotiation with an irritated witch was never a good idea. It would be to his advantage for Hermione to be agreeable, therefore it would be best if she were comfortable, more relaxed.

He closed the folder as he stood and reached his hand out to her. “Come, Pet. Stand up.”

She took his hand and let out a soft breath of relief as she stood.

Draco scanned her naked form one more time, fighting his impulse to simply take her at this moment. Everything about her was inviting; her creamy, soft skin with its slight pink blush, her pert nipples standing at attention under his gaze, her neatly trimmed chestnut curls at the apex of her thighs, the scent of arousal she was emitting, and then her eyes... Soft, fawn-brown irises with flecks of gold. He could get lost in her eyes, but right now there was another part of her body he was dying to get lost in. He took a deep calming breath, forcing himself to keep it together

Still holding her hand, he led her to the wall that was opposite the glass wall. He tapped it with his wand and a door appeared. Opening it, he led her into a large walk in closet with an attached bathroom.

Hermione’s jaw dropped. The hidden closet was bigger than her bedroom. Several muggle suits as well as wizarding robes were hanging pristinely. There were several pairs of dress shoes as well as casual ones on shelves clearly designed for the purpose of holding them. There were drawers built into the wall of varying heights and widths. She noticed the bathroom, as well as another door that was closed. He led her to where several dress shirts were hanging, handing her one. “Here, Pet. Put this on. Don’t button it.”

Hermione took the white, button down he handed her and slipped it on. She shook her head in dismay as she looked around her. “Why do you have so many clothes here?”

Draco reached towards her and gently took her right wrist, speaking softly. “Sometimes I sleep here. Well, I used to, before the divorce. It was hard to be at home sometimes.” As he spoke, he rolled up first her right and then her left sleeve. Hermione caught her reflection in

the floor to ceiling mirror. The shirt came to her mid thighs but fell open, leaving her nakedness on display. She would have liked to have put on her bra and panties as well, but that didn't seem to be on Draco's agenda. He stepped back from her and grinned. "You are one sexy witch, Pet. I might have you dress like this when we are alone from now on."

He gestured towards to bathroom. "Feel free to use the loo and then come back to the sofa."

Leaving her behind, he exited the closet and headed back to his folder, picking it up to glance through more thoroughly. It was quite amusing Hermione had mentioned limits. He had made up this checklist several weeks ago, long before he knew Hermione would become his submissive. He had fully intended to seek out a submissive and had made this list for the purpose of determining compatibility. But amazingly, he didn't just have any submissive, he had Hermione. Looking over the listed items and activities, he was hopeful she would be adventurous and willing to try new things. He knew she had little experience, but so far, she had been very agreeable. He hoped that continued. He would take things as slowly as necessary. Now that he had her, he didn't want to scare her away.

He turned when he heard her approaching. "Sit on the sofa, Pet. Make yourself comfortable." He walked to the bar and poured them each a glass of wine. As he walked back towards her he asked, "How long can you stay this afternoon?"

She accepted the glass and pondered her answer. "I don't have any appointments, but would like to get to Gringotts if possible and it would be best if I were home by five-thirty so that I can have dinner ready by the time..." She stopped speaking, not wanting to say Theo's name and not wanting to think about him. She was doing a good job suppressing the guilt, but she knew it would hit her later.

Draco nodded, not saying anything, knowing exactly where her thoughts had taken her. "Well, we have plenty time then, as it's only two forty-five."

He picked up the folder and quill and sat down next to her. "So, I just so happen to have a D/s agreement and checklist. It's something I've been working on for a few weeks. The first page just generalizes the nature of the relationship and then I have specific activities and limits listed on another page." It wasn't written with you specifically in mind, so the monogamous part clearly doesn't apply. "He handed it to her.

Hermione scanned it over:

Submissive behavioral expectations while in the presence of the Dominant:

1. Submissive will obey Dominant at all times as long as his demands fall within the confines of this agreement.
2. Submissive will not speak unless spoken to.
3. Submissive will refer to Dominant as 'Sir', unless given leave otherwise.
4. Submissive will not look Dominant in the eyes unless given permission.
5. Submissive will dress as Dominant requests.
6. Submissive will use agreed upon safe word if at any time she wishes the scenario or activity to stop.

7. Submissive will be monogamous and will not engage in any sexual activities with anyone other than the Dominant.

8. Submissive will communicate to Dominant any concerns, needs or desires during agreed upon times of open discussion. She will remain respectful during these conversations.

Dominant behavioral expectations while in the presence of submissive;

1. The Dominant acknowledges that the submissive chooses to yield power, and therefore the ultimate control lies with her. Without her consent, the Dominant holds no power over her.

2. Through the power yielded to him, the Dominant will strive to meet the submissive's need to relinquish control in a safe environment. The safety of the submissive will be paramount.

3. The Dominant will strive to meet the submissive's sexual, physical and emotional needs and desires. To meet these needs, in addition to other means at his disposal, he will punish and/or reward the submissive as he determines necessary.

4. The Dominant will respect the limits of the submissive, avoiding all hard limits and pushing soft limits in a way the Dominant deems appropriate. Limits will be re-addressed at periodic intervals as trust builds between the parties.

5. The Dominant will communicate and will allow the submissive to communicate any concerns, needs or desires during agreed upon times of open discussion.

6. The Dominant will not engage in any sexual activities with anyone other than the submissive.

7. The Dominant will cherish the gift of submission and recognizes the trust the submissive has bestowed upon him. He will never take advantage of that trust or abuse his power over the submissive in any way.

Hermione looked up and turned to him.

His eyes were on hers, a touch of uncertainty in his expression. He took the sheet from her. "Well, what do you think?" Before she could answer he continued, "I have another sheet that lists out specific activities."

Hermione was quiet, lost in thought. After a minute or so she responded, "well, with the exception of number 7 on the submissive's part, I don't see anything that I can't live with. I like that we will have periods of open communication." She paused and looked out the window. 'Given that we are friends outside of this arrangement and given the fact that our jobs may bring us together occasionally, I think we need to have clear parameters about what specific times and situations the behaviors will be expected.' She gave him a stern look. "Also, what I stressed at lunch is very important. This... arrangement... has nothing to do with work and you can't punish me for anything work related."

Draco rolled his eyes, "Yes, you made that perfectly clear." He gave her a stern look in return. "I also would like us to agree on a minimum amount of time we spend together each week. I don't want to go several days without seeing you."

Hermione shrugged. "I work for myself. As long as we can meet up during the day, I don't see why I can't see you a couple times a week." Hermione started chewing her lip, lost in

thought.

He watched her for a minute before asking. “What is it, Granger? You’ve got that look on your face again. Now’s the time to bring up your concerns.”

Hermione looked up at him, concern etched on her face. “Draco, the monogamous part. I realize that given our particular situation that piece doesn’t apply, but I can’t help wondering, are you sleeping with anyone right now?”

Draco studied her, contemplating how to respond. “Pet, I’m not currently sleeping with anyone but you.” He sighed, ‘I have no desire for a wife or even a girlfriend.’ He gave her a stern look. “But, I need to see you, Granger. When I wrote this, I was envisioning a submissive who would be available to me on weekends and a couple times a week. I realize you can’t commit to that amount of time, but at least twice a week I want to see you. I would prefer more.”

Hermione nodded, chewing her bottom lip. “I’ll do my best, Draco. We’ll have to figure out some kind of schedule and some way of communicating, other than owls coming to my office.”

Draco nodded in agreement. “I think it would be best if we mixed up where we meet as well. Meeting here sometimes will work, especially as long as you are representing that goblin.” He rolled his eyes. ‘But, I think we should meet somewhere less... visible.’ He thought for a minute. “Maybe I’ll rent us a flat somewhere.” Another idea came to him. “Perhaps we could use charmed jewelry or coins or something to communicate. You know, like you so brilliantly thought up and implemented for the DA back at Hogwarts.” Hermione nodded, her mind absently thinking back to Hogwarts. She shook it off, not wanting to let herself get caught up in those memories.

Draco interrupted her train of thought. “This is a list of sexual limits. It has over 100 items listed on it which I collected from various BDSM resource materials, as well as my own experiences. It includes sexual acts, types of role play, punishment devices, pleasure devices and types of bondage.” He pointed to the side of the sheet. “You need to assign a number from 1-5 for each item. A five means you love it. A one means it’s a soft limit. A soft limit is something you don’t have any desire to do and might be willing to do it down the road if we work up to it. Go ahead and just cross out things you will not do, in other words, your hard limits.”

She looked it over and noticed he had already crossed out some items. Such as acts involving animals or human waste. She took her time reading down the list and then looked up at him. “Do you want me to do this now? This is quite a list!”

Draco grinned. “No time like the present. Besides, I’m exceptionally curious what your limits are.”

She took the quill he offered her, “Fine, but it will take me a while.”

Draco watched her as she studied and read down the page, making occasional marks before starting from the top again. She turned to him, “Draco, most of these I’ve never done before. I... I don’t know and can only guess what I will like and won’t like.” She looked back at the list and made a few more marks.

“Don’t overthink this, Pet. We’ll make adjustments as we go. Just... try to be open minded, ok?” He continued, in a reassuring tone. “We’ll start with things you know you like and I’ll slowly introduce you to more experiences. We’ll continue to explore what you enjoy and leave behind what you don’t.” He peeked at what she had marked and was pleased she scored oral sex, both giving and receiving with 5’s.

She noticed him looking over her shoulder, “Go away! I can’t think straight with you... hovering over me.” She shooed him away, playfully.

Disappointed, he conceded. “Fine, I’ll go to my desk and give you some... space.”

Draco looked up when she started towards him with the folder. The oversized shirt billowed open as she walked towards him, giving him a lovely view of her naked body, covered only by thigh high stockings. Her stockings and heels were acceptable, but now that she was his, he would prefer to see her in the finest silks and lingerie. She walked up close beside him on his left, laying the folder on his desk in front of him.

He opened it with his right hand and began running his left hand up and down her right thigh as he read. He tried not to show too much excitement as he read over her list. While she had a lot of 1’s, she had only crossed out a couple lines. She was even more adventurous than he had hoped for. Soft limits could be worked with, hard limits were off the table and her hard limits were more than reasonable. After looking it over, he pushed his chair back from the desk. He had waited as long as he could. He wanted her... now.

“Kneel in front of my chair.”

Hermione tried to contain her irritation as she went to her knees in front of him... once again. The list had aroused her, and she wanted his hands on her. In truth, she had wanted him to touch her ever since lunch and every time she thought he was going to, she had been let down. Her gaze slid from his eyes to his hands as he began to undo his buckle and untuck his shirt. Her anticipation grew as he unzipped his trousers and his erection sprang free. He stroked it a couple times as he looked her in the eyes, his unspoken command quite obvious.

Hermione shifted herself over his lap and took the mushroom head of his swollen cock into her mouth. She took her time, moving slowly down and back up, her tongue swirling and massaging his length as she got a feel for him. She felt his hands on the back of her head before he grabbed a handful of hair, guiding her movements, controlling her pace. She concentrated on relaxing her throat and jaw, taking him deeper with each pass until she couldn’t take him any further without gagging. He let out a hiss and pulled her head away from him.

“Sit on the desk, facing me,” he demanded in an urgent voice. He took her hand, helping her to stand as he pushed his chair back. She slid onto his desk and obeyed when he whispered in a raw voice, “Spread your legs, wide.” His eyes feasted on her glistening folds as she placed her feet on the arms of his chair. He rolled the chair closer, inhaling her sweet and tangy scent of arousal as he moved his mouth to her core. She let out a keening mewl as he slowly moved his tongue up and down her pussy, occasionally swirling his tongue over her erect clit. She fell back on his desk, her hips undulating wantonly as he feasted. Suddenly, he pushed away from his chair, standing up and looking down at her spread out before him, his hands on her knees holding her open. He urgently stepped closer and reached under her

thighs, lifting her as he slid into her. He let out a low growl and after a brief pause, he began pumping her quickly.

Hermione's climax was building quickly. He was rough, and hard and pumping her with abandon. She thrust her hips eagerly, keeping up with his pace, loving the feel of him inside her. He moved his right hand from under her thigh and grabbed her left breast, massaging it and pinching her nipple roughly which caused her to squeal as her eyes rolled back in ecstasy. He continued to pluck and then pinch her before massaging her entire breast again, relishing the affect he was having on her. It was clear she enjoyed rough breast handling. Her climax continued to build as he pumped her vigorously. His left hand moved to her clit and gave it a hard rub as he gave her nipple another hard pinch. A smile crept across his mouth when she quivered and shook as her orgasm overcame her. His hand continued massaging her breast as the fluttering of her inner walls stimulated him to his own release. A throaty moan escaped his mouth as he collapsed forward on top of her, slowly catching his breath.

After his breathing slowed he pulled his head back and looked down at her. His eyes moved from her sated gaze to her mouth and then back to her eyes. He stared into them for a couple seconds and then crashed his mouth onto hers. His kiss was demanding. Her mouth fought back with the same urgency, their tongues wrestling for dominance before Hermione relaxed and gave into him. He smiled as he kissed her, recognizing her conceding control. He kissed down her neck to her throat to her breasts where he sucked on each of her rock-hard nipples. Her left nipple was very red from his aggressive attentions and she moaned slightly when he plucked it with his teeth. "Tender, Pet?" He asked her teasingly, with a knowing, deviant grin.

Her eyes glittered with a playful gleam. "Why on earth would it be tender?"

He laughed as he pulled himself up, now standing and looking down at her still spread out before him. He reached his hand out to her. "Come, let's get that taken care of, shall we?"

As he led her back to his bathroom he internally rejoiced that she had given breast play a 4 on her limits list. He would have to invest in some nipple clamps, which she had only given a 2, with an asterisk. She had put an asterisk next to every activity she had never done before. He could tell that once she experienced them, she would love them.

He led her towards the sink and sat her on the stool against the wall. He took the container of skin calming balm and scooped out a small amount. He turned towards her and said softly. "Lift your breasts and present them to me."

Hermione thought for a second or two and then lifted them, holding them up as he delicately rubbed the balm over her tender peaks, paying particular attention to her left one which had been pinched multiple times. The balm left her skin feeling first tingly and then cool. She looked down to see her nipple was no longer red, but back to its normal pink shade.

He let out a sigh and put the container back on the shelf. "Is there any chance I can see you this weekend?"

Hermione shook her head. "I... don't know. Theo usually stays home on the weekends, he rarely works. Sometimes he has family obligations... which you know I am no part of." She couldn't help the slight bitterness in her voice.

He turned to her. "His mother still harboring the same old biases?"

She shrugged. "His mother... tolerates me. I think she still blames me for his father's death in Azkaban."

Draco nodded and stroked her cheek in sympathy. "I'm sorry, Pet. You don't deserve that." She stood up and followed him back to the sofa where he picked up her clothes and handed them to her. She slid off his shirt and began to dress.

He stepped back and watched her. "Pet, if you can get away, even for an hour, send me an owl." She nodded and continued dressing. An idea came to him. "I want to know you are thinking of me this weekend." She was zipping up her skirt.

"Look at me." He demanded. His tone was no longer soft. His eyes were dark and his stance Dominant. 'Tonight, you will not drink any alcohol. You will eat a hearty dinner because you barely touched your lunch. Tomorrow you will eat breakfast, with eggs and a meat of some sort.' He started to pace. "At noon, if you are home, you will walk to the living room window and look across the street. You will be thinking of me and imagining me standing behind you, kissing your neck, pressing myself against you. You will run your hand down your front and lightly pinch your nipple over your shirt." He paused. "I might be watching, I might not. If you are home and do not follow my instruction, I will punish you. If I find out you have disobeyed any of these instructions, you will be punished... Do you understand?"

Hermione swallowed and nodded. "Yes. I understand."

He walked over to her and pulled her to him, giving her an urgent kiss. "Come to me... here... on Monday, 10 am. Can you do that?"

Hermione ran through her schedule for next week in her mind. "Yes, yes I think so."

He looked down at her. "Think about a way for us to communicate. I will work on finding a more... suitable place for us to meet." He watched her as she finished dressing. 'You might be married to Theo, but you also belong to me, Pet.' His tone became softer. "I realize we didn't discuss or agree to you obeying me when we aren't together, but I need this from you. I need to know you are thinking of me."

Hermione looked up at him, realizing for the first time that his need for her, matched, if not surpassed, her need for him. She reached up and stroked his face with the back of her hand. "I will do as you say, Draco. There's no going back now. I'm married to Theo, but I'm your submissive. I'll do as you say, and I'll be thinking of you."

Chapter 12

Thanks so much for your reviews, favs and follows :) You are the best and your wonderful encouragement is what makes me want to keep writing. A guest reviewer asked, and I want to clarify, that Draco did not have any sexual relations with Bellatrix. He walked in on Rudophus punishing her and that's how he found out his uncle was a Dominant. Thanks for the question!

Hermione left Draco's office and made it to Gringott's just before closing at five o'clock. Amazingly, it wasn't crowded, and she was able to make arrangements for Lizzy's raise quite quickly. The next pay transfer into her Gringott's account would reflect the 10% increase.

Hermione apparated to the corner market and was home by a little after five-fifteen to start dinner. She had just taken the baked chicken out of the oven when Theo walked in the front door at six o'clock on the nose. He walked over, peeking over her shoulder at the chicken before kissing her on the cheek and patting her on the bottom. "Smells great, kitten."

She watched his back as he headed towards their bedroom to change clothes. The tug of guilt was getting stronger the longer she was away from Draco, the same thoughts chastising her over and over again. *How can you do this to Theo? He loves you and you betray him with his best friend? What is wrong with you?!*

She had just finished setting everything on the table when Theo came out of the bedroom and took his seat. She served his plate and then her own before sitting across from him. He offered her a small smile as he took his first bite.

Neither spoke as they ate, which was not uncommon. They just didn't converse with each other like they used to. "So, how was your day?" She finally asked, not able to take the silence.

He shrugged, "It was fine. Things are moving along nicely." He took another bite and after swallowing asked, "How about you? How was yours?"

It was great! I'm now officially your best friends submissive and I fucked him less than two hours ago. "It was uneventful. I had lunch with Draco about my client. If what he says is true, Malfoy Enterprises was justified in its decision not to hire her." She played with her food, lost in thought about everything that had happened today. "But, I'm not sure I believe Draco was completely forthcoming."

Theo smirked, rolling his eyes in exasperation as he replied in a teasing manner. "Of course, you aren't! You wouldn't be Hermione Nott if you simply believed *everything* you were told. You have an uncanny ability to sniff out the truth in most situations."

Hermione slowed her chewing as his words sunk in. She swallowed and took a sip of water. Something about what he said bothered her. It irritated her for some reason, although she wasn't sure why. She watched him eat, losing her own appetite, as he devoured his plate, absently looking up and smiling at her occasionally. The more she watched him, the more he started to get on her nerves. Even the way he chewed his food was irritating her.

She closed her eyes and took a deep breath, scolding herself. *What is your problem? You're the cheating bitch of a wife!* She picked up her fork and moved the food around her plate as her mind spun with thoughts of Draco and her being an adulteress. *How could you do this, Hermione?*

She glanced back up at her oblivious husband. She could list several reasons for her betrayal; boredom, lack of sexual fulfillment, a husband who would rather stare at the TV for hours on end than engage in conversation.

She let out a sad internal sigh. She missed her old Theo terribly.

The Theo who loved to discuss books and debate politics.

The Theo who couldn't keep his hands off her.

The Theo who made her laugh.

The Theo who challenged her.

The Theo who held her and really listened to her.

Where did he go?

Did she really want to keep doing this? Lying to him? Maintaining the façade of being happy? Should she just divorce him? Wouldn't that be better than cheating on him?

An internal battle started warring within herself. What the hell was she thinking?! Her marriage to Theo might not be exciting, but he was hers. He loved her, and they had a home and a life together. They had entertained the idea of children, but Hermione wanted to wait. She felt she was too young and wanted to work several more years before children came along, but there was no denying Theo would be a good father. Despite the rut they were in, he didn't deserve to be cheated on.

They finished their meal in silence. As was their normal routine, Theo helped her clean up and then headed to the couch to watch television.

Having no desire to watch TV, Hermione headed to their bedroom to read, but first she decided to get a jump on the laundry. As she loaded up the clothes, she noticed Theo's shirt from the night before. She picked it up and stared at it before tossing it in with the rest. It just didn't sit right with her... his explanation about his back. Rough housing enough to break a table?

But why would he lie? *To hide the truth, Hermione.*

She recalled his comment about her not simply believing everything she was told. He was right. She questioned everything. She knew better than to take anything at face value. So, why was she taking what Theo said at face value? Why did she never apply that to him?

She shook her head dismissively at her internal dialogue. Theo was different! He was her husband. She trusted him like no other. If she couldn't trust him, whom could she ever trust? *He can't trust you... or at least he shouldn't. If you aren't to be trusted, is it such a leap to think he might not be trustworthy either?*

Hermione began to feel sick to her stomach. She didn't like where her chain of thought was going. As hypocritical as it might be, the thought of Theo being unfaithful was devastating. She knew her cheating on Theo would be devastating to him as well. It was important he never find out. She would die if she hurt him like that.

Deciding to take a quick shower before running the load of laundry, she undressed and looked at herself in the mirror. *Cheater!* She exhaled heavily as her eyes scanned down her reflection. Her nipples showed no evidence of Draco's manipulations earlier. Wondering if it was still tender, she lightly touched it her left nipple. It was mildly sore. She gave it a small pinch and closed her eyes as she imagined it was Draco's touch and not her own. She pinched it harder as she moved her other hand to her other breast. Massaging them both, her breathing began to quicken as her arousal started to build. She envisioned Draco standing before her, instructing her every move. Her right hand began to move down past her stomach as her left continued to massage and pinch her breasts.

She could picture him perfectly. His hair messy, his grey eyes dark with desire. She could see him scanning her body, focusing first on the hand on her breasts and then following her other hand as it moved between her legs. Her breath hitched as she began to rub. *"That's it. Pinch your nipple harder,"* his sultry voice would command. She followed fantasy Draco's instruction and let out a soft moan. She imagined his eyes now focusing on the hand that was rubbing between her legs. His eyes would even darker. *"Keep rubbing that wet pussy... faster... harder... That's it, my little Pet."* Dirty talking Draco was turning up the fantasy to a whole new level and the coiling spring in her gut was wounding tighter and tighter.

Her legs began to feel weak, so she eased herself to the floor, laying on her back and spreading her legs wide. She could picture his hungry gaze, focused on her sex as he egged her on. *"That's it... spread your legs wider. Let me see all of you."* Her breathing became faster... erratic as her heart rate began to build. She could feel and hear her heart pounding in her ears as she began gyrating her hips back and forth, her imaginary Draco now crouching over her with a lust filled gaze. *"That's it my little vixen... cum for me!... Cum now!"* Hermione let out a throaty groan and her body tensed as the coil sprung free and bliss rolled through her in waves. Her legs flopped like limp noodles as she rolled onto her side, slowly catching her breath.

After a minute, she stood on wobbly legs and once again looked at her reflection in the mirror. Her face was flushed and her hair a mess. Her forehead crinkled with confusion. *"Who are you?"* She asked herself and then answered. *A woman who cheats on her husband and masturbates on the bathroom floor!* Turning away from the mirror in disgust, she padded to the shower and started the water, making it hot. She welcomed the powerful jets as they washed away her sins of the day.

Dressed in her camisole and sleep shorts, she slid into bed and picked up her book, staring at the words on the page, comprehending none of it. She couldn't get the idea out of her head that Theo could be cheating on her. It was a thought she had never entertained or considered possible. But why was that? Looking at it objectively, all the signs pointed to trouble... his decreased interest in her sexually as well as his apparent lack of true interest in her as a whole. She could easily see he was bored of her. How could he not be? She was bored out of her skull! Her mind wandered back to the night before; the very late hour he came home and

the scratches on his back. It really wasn't a far reach. She was cheating on him, after all. Simple logic dictated he could be cheating her as well.

She put her book down on her bedside table and took a cleansing breath. *Get a grip, Hermione! Don't let your mind run away with you.* Yes, perhaps there were signs that seemed obvious when looking from the outside, but she knew her husband. She knew he loved her. She knew she loved him, even if she was no longer *in* love with him. *But you aren't truly happily married, Hermione. You haven't been for a long time.* She rubbed her temples as the beginnings of a headache was settling in.

Taking another deep breath, she decided she needed quill and scroll. She wanted to jot down her thoughts as her mind was going too many different directions. She needed to get control over her thoughts and use her analytical brain to figure out how she really felt. She sat up on the side of the bed and opened her bedside drawer, sighing heavily when nothing to write on or with was found. She hopped out of bed and wandered into the spare bedroom that was used as a library and office.

She began digging through the messy drawers. Theo was the one who used this desk, not her. She rolled her eyes in disgust at the disorganization. Finally, she found some blank paper buried under random items in a bottom drawer.

As she pulled a piece of paper out, Theo surprised her coming up behind her. "Whatcha doin, kitten?" He asked, patting her bottom.

She grabbed a muggle pen that was in the drawer and turned back to face him. "Just needed something to write on and a pen," she replied, nonchalantly. She couldn't help the feeling that he didn't want her in there. It would take something significant to pull him away from his TV show. She found herself suddenly very suspicious of him and didn't know if she was finally seeing the light or if she was being completely irrational... hence her need to get her thoughts on paper.

She walked past him, heading to the bedroom and noticed he lingered near the desk for a minute or so before following her into their room. She was telling herself to remain calm and not to jump to conclusions, but her intuition had her convinced she was married to a cheating bastard of a husband.

"What are you working on?" He asked, quietly.

She had her back to him and rolled her eyes in frustration. "Just some ideas I want to jot down about Moxie's case." She put the pen and scroll on her bedside table and climbed into bed.

Theo walked around to her side of the bed and watched her get herself settled. She was sitting up, leaning against the headboard. He made a show of tucking her legs in the blankets before leaning over her and kissing her head. He whispered, sweetly, "Love you, Kitten."

Another wash of guilt came over her when she looked up into his bright blue eyes. His expression was one of pure adoration. She sighed heavily as some of the tension escaped her. Her eyes met his and she smiled softly at him. He leaned down again, his right hand stroking her cheek tenderly as he gave her a passionate kiss. When the kiss ended, she ruffled his hair. "You need a haircut," she whispered.

He flashed her his signature boyish grin that always made her heart melt. “How about you cut it tomorrow and then I’ll take you out for a nice dinner. Invite the Potters and Weasleys if you want. We haven’t dined with them in ages.”

She responded warmly, “that’s a good idea. I’ll send an owl in the morning.” He kissed her on the forehead before straightening and turning away.

Her eyes on his retreating back, she questioned her doubt of him. Her heart just couldn’t agree with where her head was going. Theo would never cheat on her! She stared at the pen and scroll next to her. A big part of her wanted to ignore her sudden doubts she was having. Perhaps ignorance really was bliss. But she knew it was impossible. The seed of doubt had been planted and she needed to figure out the truth.

An hour later, Hermione looked over her notes. There were three major points;

First, she knew that she was not happy in her marriage.

Second, she was more convinced her husband was having an affair.

Third, she was having an affair.

She tossed her pen on the table and folded up the piece of paper she had written on. She tucked it into her book so that she could look at it again in the morning. Perhaps in the morning she would feel differently... draw a different conclusion.

She nestled herself down into bed and turned her bedside light off. As she stared into the darkness she could hear the TV in the background. She rolled to her left so that she was facing the door. The bedroom was dark except for the blueish, flickering light filtering in from the TV in the other room. If, when she woke up in the morning, she still felt the same, she would hire a private investigator. She contemplated just asking Theo outright if he was having an affair, but she wasn’t emotionally ready for that conversation. She knew she wouldn’t believe him if he denied it and she knew she would be an emotional wreck if he admitted it. Either way, she would be miserable. For now, she would avoid that pain. Besides, it was best he was not aware she suspected him.

Her mind wandered to Draco. She wondered where his allegiance would lie. Would he stay with her if she divorced Theo? Would he ditch her and support his best friend? He made it clear that he liked it that she was married. He said he didn’t want a wife. Perhaps her being married was a big part of his attraction. She didn’t think she could take it if he dumped her. Perhaps she should break up with him before he had a chance to break up with her? She sighed despondently and rolled to her other side. *Don’t be juvenile, Hermione!* As she thought about Draco, an uncomfortable thought came to mind. *What if Draco already knows that Theo is having an affair? What if he knows who Theo is seeing?* She pushed that disturbing thought out of her head.

She started thinking about who Theo might be cheating on her with. He didn’t currently work with any witches. He had worked with a couple witches at WLP and he certainly helped a lot of witches through that program. The truth was that Theo was very handsome. She noticed other witches checking him out when they were in public. She never gave it much thought, but the truth was, if Theo decided he wanted to stray, he would have no trouble finding a partner.

She reached into her bedside drawer and pulled out the little blue vial of sleeping draught. She would never get to sleep without it.

Hermione awoke the next morning feeling confident. After having a good night's rest, she was confident she could handle whatever came her way. She also felt that while she cared whether or not Theo had been cheating on her, the truth was she was cheating on him, and she didn't like how that made her feel about herself. She also wasn't happy in her marriage, regardless of who was cheating on whom. Therefore, she would rectify that situation. She would not only be contacting a private investigator on Monday, but a divorce attorney as well. If Draco dumped her because he was siding with Theo or if he dumped her because she was no longer married, she would be disappointed, but she would be ok. It's not as if she was in love with Draco.

She hopped out of bed and put on her robe. Theo was still sound asleep, lightly snoring. She headed to the kitchen and started a pot of coffee. She felt a huge sense of relief. It's not that she wasn't sad, because she was. It's just that she knew she needed to be logical. Logic was her friend. Logic had kept her on track most of her life and had not let her down. She hadn't been happy for a long time. It was time she changed that.

As the coffee brewed she stared out the kitchen window. She worried about how Theo would take it. Maybe... maybe he would be ok with it. Maybe he's been having the same struggles that she was. She didn't want to hurt him, and she really didn't want a bitter divorce. Perhaps she would skip the private investigator and just see the attorney. *Does it really matter whether or not he's been faithful? It comes out to the same either way. You've been unfaithful. Maybe let sleeping dogs lie.*

The coffee finished brewing and she poured herself a cup. A small shadow of doubt entered her mind. *What about marriage counseling? Are you really just going to give up on your marriage without fighting for it?* She sipped her cup and decided Theo's response would play into that decision. After being unhappy for so long, she was ready to walk away with divorce paper in hand and start a new life. It was as though she had come to an epiphany the night before and she was suddenly over her marriage. She realized she had just been going through the motions for years. But was that fair to Theo? To the best of her knowledge, he'd been happy. *A happy wizard doesn't cheat on his witch.* What if she was wrong and he hadn't been cheating on her? While she was quite certain he had been unfaithful, she still cared about Theo too much to be dismissive of his feelings. If he wanted to fight for their marriage, perhaps she would fight as well. She would let his reaction help her decide.

She continued pondering. *When do you tell him?* She dreaded talking to Theo about a divorce, but knew it had to be done. However, she also realized that she had pulled a 180 in regard to her feelings about her marriage over a very short amount of time. She felt her mind was clear and her decision was the right one, but she would give herself the weekend to be sure. This was entirely too important a decision to be impulsive about. However, she would see an attorney on Monday and talk to Theo Monday evening if she didn't change her mind.

Hermione started cleaning. She felt surprisingly energized considering what she had decided that morning. She had completely cleaned the kitchen and living room and was now contemplating the office. As she peeked in the room, her thoughts went back to Theo's strange behavior the night before. Curiosity had her wondering if there was something in this space he was trying to hide. After a short internal battle, she entered and started to clean. If

she found anything incriminating, well... it would just help her feel less guilty about initiating a divorce.

She started with the book shelves. The eye level shelves were used the most frequently and were fine. But the top and bottom shelves were messy and disorganized. They were extremely dusty as well, now that she was taking a closer look. She transfigured the chair into a ladder and climbed up so that she could get a better look at the top two shelves. As she dusted, she noticed there was an area of the top shelf that lacked any dust. It was odd. She leaned to the right to get a better look and noticed a collection of notebooks and a few covered hardback books that were dust free as well. Clearly, Theo frequented these.

She pulled one of the notebooks out and stared at the front of it, suddenly feeling a tad apprehensive about what she might find inside. *Probably wizard porn*, she thought with an internal roll of her eyes. When she opened it, it appeared to be a journal, but the pages were blank. She grabbed the other notebooks and they were blank as well. However, their edges were worn, and the notebooks looked like they were handled frequently. *Hmm... a charm perhaps?* She contemplated and then grabbed her wand out of her robe pocket. She pointed it the first notebook. "*Revealio*". Nothing happened. She contemplated again trying to think of what password or phrase Theo would use. She spent the next 10 minutes attempting phrases and words. She was about to give up when an idea came to her. Back in the beginning, when their D/s play was at its most prevalent, he used to make her say a particular phrase in the bedroom. She swallowed and held her wand over the notebooks one last time, whispering, "*Master, may I?*"

Hermione let out a slow breath as suddenly the pages were full of words. Her heart began to pound. She looked at her watch and knew Theo would be up soon. She climbed down the ladder, clutching the notebooks close to her chest. She pulled four pieces of paper out of the bottom drawer of the desk and transfigured them into notebooks that matched the ones clenched in her arms. She waved her wand, sending the transfigured blank notebooks up to the top shelf. If Theo looked in the room, it would appear the notebooks were untouched. She shrunk the original notebooks with her favorite spell and tucked them into her robe pocket. She then transfigured the ladder back into the chair and left the room.

She peeked into her bedroom to find Theo still sound asleep. She quietly dressed in jeans and a t-shirt before putting the miniaturized notebooks in her jean's pocket and leaving him a note in the kitchen. '*I'm running errands. Be back soon.*' She left the note on the kitchen table and flooded to her office.

Chapter 13

Thanks for reading and reviewing!

Hermione leaned back in her chair. The enormity of what was before her overwhelmed her. Theo was not only cheating on her, but was basically leading another life and had been for the past five years. She was so stunned, she was numb. She didn't know what to do. She didn't know how to process this. She looked at her watch. It was just after 10 am and she had been in her office for a little over an hour.

She spun her chair around, looking out the window at the street below. Strangely, a part of her felt relief. She would be completely justified in divorcing him and no longer felt an ounce of guilt for cheating on him with Draco. After all, he had been cheating on her for years.

Taking a deep breath, she turned her chair back around and stared down at the notebooks. She flipped open the one that she had already determined to be the oldest and read the first entry;

Little Minx,

Use this diary to communicate with me. Our journals are connected. When you write an entry, I can read it in my journal. When I respond, you can read what I have written. I expect you to write at least one entry per day. I might not write a response daily, but rest assured, my precious little minx, that I am reading. Be sure to cast the spell I showed you so that no one else can read it. I know you don't want your husband discovering our little secret any more than I want my wife. Write an entry tonight, this is not a request.

Master

The response was on the same page.

Master,

Thank you for this lovely gift of communication. The thought that I can write to you and have a way of connecting with you gives me great pleasure. I hate it that I see you so rarely. The secrecy of our situation demands it, but it's still so very hard. It was so much easier when your wife was working late hours. I will write to you every evening and dream of when I am with you again.

I am so happy we have reconnected after so many years. Even though we hadn't seen each other in over three years, it felt like home when I ran into you at the library. Remember all those nights in the Hogwarts Library? It's a wonder we were never caught. It feels right to be yours again, well... in truth... I always was. I may have married another, but I will always be yours.

D

Hermione flipped a couple pages forward.

Little Minx,

You were a very good witch today and I'm pleased you worked out a way to come to me. I can slip away from WLP as needed. The rooms you have secured for us are perfect. I would like you there again on Wednesday at 1pm sharp. I will give you further instructions in a later entry.

Master

Master,

Today was heavenly. Thank you for listening to me and allowing me to vent my insecurities and frustrations. You are such a tolerant Master. I am feeling much better and I respect that your marriage is important to you and will not ask you to run away with me again. The fact that you are willing to decrease how much intimacy you have with her is enough. And, most importantly, the fact that you have promised to only be my Dominant. You were mine first. I trust that you will do as you have promised.

Yours,

D

Hermione closed the notebook. It was all falling into place. This "D" was someone he had been with at Hogwarts. For whatever reason they had stopped seeing each other and in the interim Theo had met and married Hermione. She remembered, once again, that it was after about two years of marriage that everything changed. She had been working long hours for about three months on securing ministry representation for all magical beings. That must have been when Theo reconnected with this woman. Then over the course of the next six months or so, Theo had gradually pulled back from Hermione. They had sex less frequently until it became a Saturday night ritual. Hermione felt rage building up inside of her. Theo had changed his treatment of her at the request of this other woman. She wanted to know who this 'D' was. The only D she could think of was Daphne Greengrass. She had been in Slytherin and in Theo's year as well. Which meant she was also in Hermione's year. She was also the older sister of Draco's x-wife, Astoria.

She slammed the notebook closed and stood up. She started pacing as she ran her hands through her hair. *How could Theo have done this?* They had still been really happy when he started his affair. Granted she had been working a lot for a period of time, but for him to have started cheating on her, he must not have been as happily married as she was. *Maybe he loved her. Maybe he had always loved this other witch and it had nothing to do with you.* Her mind started to spin with scenarios and possible reasons for why he strayed. It hurt. She couldn't deny that she was crushed. She started shaking and slid to the floor, tears streaming down her face. Sobs erupted from her as she laid on the cool hard wood floor behind her desk. Suddenly she felt like she wasn't alone. She pushed herself up and looked towards the pull. Theo was standing in the doorway of her office, his face stricken.

He swallowed as his eyes darted from the journals on her desk and back to her. He stepped towards her.

"Don't you dare!" She screeched at him. "How could you? You're a bloody, fucking bastard." Suddenly she was on her feet and lunged at him, hitting him over and over again on the chest. He just stood there and took it.

His voice was shaky. "I'm sorry... I'm so sorry, kitten."

She stepped back from him, pushing against his chest. "Get out! Get out!" She demanded.

He didn't move. She continued stepping back from him until she bumped into her desk. Her eyes then slowly came up to meet his. Her voice suddenly weak, shaky. "How could you, Theo? Why?"

He stood there, watching her, pain evident as silent tears began rolling down his cheeks. "I've loved you since our first date, Hermione." He swallowed and paused. "But, but I love her, too."

Hermione felt like the wind had been knocked out of her. *He loved this other woman.* It didn't matter that two hours ago Hermione had decided to divorce this man and had even decided that she didn't really need to know if he had been cheating. This was a betrayal that hurt unlike anything she had imagined. *It wasn't just sex. He LOVED this other woman. It was the ultimate betrayal.*

She slumped and her eyes fell the floor. He stepped towards her and grabbed her, pulling her to him. He held her tight. Hermione didn't move. She didn't cry, she didn't wrap her arms around him. She was frozen, hardly comprehending his presence or the fact he was holding her as the finality and reality of it all overwhelmed her.

After a couple minutes, she realized he was holding her. He was stroking her head with his hand as his other rubbed her back. Her voice was strong and commanding. "Theo, get your disgusting hands off me."

Theo stepped back from her. She took a deep breath and looked up at him. Her face no longer showed a hint of sadness. She was all business. "Who is D, Theo?"

He swallowed. "Daphne... Daphne Pucey. You... you knew her as Greengrass."

Hermione nodded. "You dated her at Hogwarts?"

He nodded.

"You've been with her for five of our seven years?" Her voice remained strong, her expression calm.

He swallowed heavily. "Off and on. I broke it off twice and she broke it off once." He paused and she didn't say anything. "I felt so guilty for... cheating on you. I hated myself for it." His voice was small, meek. He looked broken.

She nodded. She didn't say anything, but she knew that guilt. Up until this morning she had harbored the same guilt. As her rational mind began to take over from her emotional one, she could see that he was hurting. It pleased her.

"I would appreciate it if you could stay away from our residence for the day. Give me until 8pm to get my belongings shrunk and put into boxes. You can keep Bernie, he was yours before we met."

Theo slid to the floor on his knees and grabbed her calves. His voice shaky, his expression desperate, "Kitten, please. Don't leave me."

Her voice held a monotone disinterest. "I'll be out by 8pm and I'll file for divorce on Monday." With that, she stepped away from him, walked out of her office and walked away

from her marriage.

9pm, Grimmauld Place

“Mione, are you sure you’re ok?” Hermione smiled at her three dear friends. Harry, Ron and Ginny were watching her with concern on their faces and love in their eyes.

She smiled at them. “Honestly, I’m fine. I’ve been unhappily married for so long, that I’m actually starting to feel relief over everything else. It... it was a shock and he... the fact that he betrayed me for..” she paused and shook her head in disbelief, ‘he betrayed me for so many years.’ She let out a laugh that held no humor or joy in it, only disbelief. “I have only myself to blame. I should have known, I should have questioned him five years ago when things started to change. But... but, I just thought we were evolving. I thought... well..it doesn’t matter.”

Ginny moved over to Hermione’s chair and wiggled in next to her, hugging her tightly. “We love you so much, Mione. We will always be your family, no matter if or who you are married to. You will always have us.”

Harry and Ron moved over to the witches and wrapped their arms around them... the four of them sharing a big group hug. Hermione felt warmth spread through her. She smiled as a tear fell down her right cheek. It wasn’t a tear of sadness, but a tear of love and appreciation for her dear friends.

This was a short chapter. I just felt like it was the right place to end. More will be revealed about Theo and Daphne in future chapters. Draco will be in the next chapter as well. Thanks again for reading a reviewing. :)

Chapter 14

Sunday morning Hermione woke up rested. Harry had insisted on her taking a calming as well as a sleeping draught. It had been good advice. She woke feeling very rested and despite everything that had happened the day before, she also felt calm and relieved.

She rolled out of bed and headed downstairs to the kitchen. Ginny was definitely her mother's daughter. There was an absolute feast on the kitchen table. "Ginny, there's enough food here to feed the Gryffindor table!"

Ginny shrugged. "I like to cook... and Harry likes to eat." Hermione laughed.

Ginny handed Hermione a hot cup of fresh coffee. "Besides, I know you hardly ate anything yesterday. So, this is as much for you as for him. And, I'm sure Ron will be over soon."

Sure enough, the sound of the floo in the next room was followed shortly by Ron's smiling face walking into the kitchen. Much to Hermione's pleasant surprise, Susan was following behind him. Ron had married Susan Bones about a year after Hermione had married Theo.

Hermione dashed over to the blonde witch and gave her a huge hug. Susan smiled softly. "Hey, Hermione. I'm sorry life is such a shitter right now."

Hermione laughed and shrugged, "yeah, well, it can only get better... right?"

Susan nodded. "You're better off... I never liked the fucker."

Hermione burst out laughing. Susan had always been very fond of Theo and used to joke that after she divorced Ron she was going to steal Theo away. It had been a running joke amongst the three couples.

Harry walked in the kitchen a few minutes later and the group sat down to eat.

"So, what do you need from us today, Mione?" Ron asked, slightly distracted as his wife removed two biscuits of the three on his plate as well as three of his six pieces of bacon.

"Portion control, love." Susan whispered.

Ginny shot Harry a covert smirk. They all knew Susan had her work cut out for her. Ron was getting rather thick around the middle and was having a very hard time controlling his large appetite.

Hermione shrugged as she ate another bite of eggs. After she swallowed, she replied. "I think I'm going to look for an apartment today."

Ginny and Harry both started protesting. "Hermione, stay with us! We have tons of room and it will be like old times."

Hermione smiled and lightly shook her head. "No, but thank you... thank you both," she responded sincerely. She smiled warmly at them for their generous offer. 'I really want my

own place.' She swallowed some pumpkin juice. "I just want to get settled. I want to see an attorney, get the divorce process rolling and move on with my life."

Their conversation was interrupted by the sound of the doorbell. Harry sprung from the table to answer it. They were all listening, and their heads turned to Hermione when it was Theo's voice they heard.

"Listen, you have no right to be here," Harry said angrily.

Theo's voice was pleading. "I know that. I know... just... please, give her this. Will you just... give her this letter? And tell her that I love her and I'm sorrier than I could ever..." His voice broke off as they heard the door slam.

They heard Harry stomp up the stairs and then come back down. All eyes were on him as he walked into the kitchen and looked at Hermione. "I know you all heard that. Hermione, I put the letter in your room."

He sat back down and took a sip of coffee before pushing his half-eaten breakfast away. It was clear Hermione's bespectacled best friend was upset. Hermione was the sister he never had, and Harry had grown even more protective of her as they grew older. She knew she was very lucky to have the friends she did.

Hermione had lost her appetite as well. She put down her fork and laid her napkin over her plate. What could that bastard possibly have to say? He had said enough the day before and his actions over the past five years spoke more than any mere words he could possibly put on parchment.

Suddenly, she felt like being alone. She stood up and started to walk out of the kitchen. Just before exiting, she turned back to the concerned faces of her friends. "I love you guys. Thank you for... well... thanks." With that she left the room and dashed up the stairs. The letter was on her bed. She tossed it in her suitcase, not interested in anything he had to say right now. She might read it... one day, but not now. She grabbed some clean clothes and headed for the shower.

An hour later she went downstairs and found her four friends sitting in the living room. Ron held out the Sunday Daily Prophet towards her. She took it from him, noticing the red marks placed by apartment listings.

"We marked the one's we thought you might be interested in," Ron said.

Ginny smiled at her. "We also called Pavarti. She's making floo calls now about getting you some Sunday showings."

Hermione sat down and looked over the listings. "This is great!" She looked up and smiled at her friends. "Thanks, you guys."

They spent the day running around looking at flats. Pavarti had really come through. She was not only able to get Hermione in to see the ones they had marked, but a few that had not been listed yet as well. There was a reason Patil Realtors was the top rated real estate agency for magical properties in all of Great Britain.

Hermione found a flat she absolutely loved. It was on the top floor of a three-story building close to Diagon Alley. The bottom floor was a stationery and party store and the top

two floors were leased apartments. This third floor flat was perfect for Hermione. It had lots of windows letting in tons of natural light, which Hermione loved. It had two bedrooms, a dining room (which she decided would be a library), a living room/den, an eat in kitchen and 2 1/2 baths. The best part was there were wrought iron stairs that corkscrewed up to the roof, where she had a beautiful roof top terrace. She made the deposit and would be moving in the next day.

That evening the five of them went out to dinner at Hermone's favorite Italian restaurant. After four shared bottles of chianti and more pasta than she had ever eaten in one sitting, she was exhausted and rather buzzed. It had been a great day except for the fact that the catalyst was the collapse of her marriage. Her life had been such a roller coaster the past week. From her relationship with Draco, to Theo's affair, to finding an apartment. This had all happened since Wednesday, and it was only Sunday. No wonder she was so tired.

When they got back to Grimmauld Place, there was a note left for Hermione in the owl post drop box. Ginny handed it to her. "It must be another note from Theo."

Hermione took it from the red-head, immediately recognizing the spiky writing of Draco Malfoy. She sighed heavily. Thinking about Draco was something she had hoped to put off. She really wasn't ready to make any decisions about her relationship with him. The thought of submitting to him or anyone for that matter, left a bad taste in her mouth after everything that had happened. He was also Theo's best friend. The letter was probably him breaking it off anyway.

"I'm going to bed. Thanks guys for taking such good care of me today." She hugged each of her four friends in turn and headed up to bed. She tossed Draco's note into her suitcase with Theo's. She just didn't have the energy or the desire to worry with either of them.

She fell asleep almost as soon as her head hit the pillow.

The next morning, she sent a message to Lizzy that she was taking a sick day and with the help of her friends, got moved into her new flat. She enlarged all her shrunken possessions and took her time finding the best place to put them. It didn't take too long. She was going to have to go furniture shopping as she had left all the furniture at Theo's. She only took the items that were hers and weren't shared. She didn't want anything that would remind her of him in her new home.

At one-thirty that afternoon she met with Benny Smithers. He was the best divorce attorney in magical London. Hermione insisted they not meet at his office as she didn't want any reporters or bystanders seeing her visiting a divorce attorney. The last thing she wanted was her divorce to be announced on the front page of the newspaper. It would get out soon enough, but she would enjoy the peace and privacy as long as possible. Benny assured her he could have her divorced in less than a month, as long as Theo cooperated. If he resisted, it could take longer and get messy. Hermione was asking for nothing monetary. Theo came from wealth, but she wanted no part of his money. She had plenty of her own. Because she was asking for nothing more than Theo's signature, Benny was very optimistic he could get her quick results.

Around eight o'clock that evening, her friends left for home after they had feasted on Chinese takeout with chopsticks on her kitchen floor. She walked from room to room. She loved her new apartment but... she felt alone. She was no longer part of a couple. She wasn't

one of those witches that always had to have a boyfriend and who's self-worth was determined by whom she was dating or married to, but she was used to having Theo's company. She was used to him being around. She was used to the comfort of being married and all that encompassed. Now she was alone. She wished Crookshanks was still alive. The thought of her beloved half-kneazle was the final straw. The tears flowed freely down her cheeks.

She sat on the floor in the living room and let the tears fall. There was no use fighting it and it would help her feel better. It would exhaust her, and she would sleep. After a few minutes, she stopped crying and had just stood up when there was a knock at her door. She tiptoed towards it and looked out the peephole. *Draco!*

"Let me in, Hermione. I can hear you breathing."

She rolled her eyes and wiped under them, removing all traces of her tears before opening the door. Draco walked in, his eyes on her and full of concern.

"Draco, what are you doing here? How did you find me?" She was tired, and her words and tone told him he wasn't wanted.

He didn't answer her questions. He noticed how puffy and blotchy her eyes were. "Are you ok?" He asked, cautiously.

She rolled her eyes. "I'm fine. You can walk away now knowing that I'm ok." Her tone was short and dismissive.

His posture slumped slightly, and a defeated look came over his face. He said quietly. "Do you *want* me to walk away? Are you finished with me as well?"

She looked from the floor up to his eyes. The hurt on his face was obvious. She sighed, heavily. "Draco... I don't know what end is up right now." They stood staring at each other for a few seconds. She noticed he looked tired. There were shadows under his eyes. She asked resignedly, "What did Theo tell you? What do you know about all this?"

Draco stepped towards her. "I've been with him all day. He told me about Daphne and the journals and, well, I guess he told me everything." He started to reach out for her and then pulled his hand back before adding, emphatically, "Granger, I don't give a flying fuck about him right now. You're all I'm worried about. My mind has been on you all day."

He stepped very close, his form towering over hers. Her brown eyes continued looking up into his grey. Despite herself, her heart started racing. The way he was looking at her. She shook her head slightly, willing herself to snap out of this... hold he had over her.

"Why didn't you owl me today, as I instructed in the owl I sent you?" He asked, his voice soft but his tone irritated.

Hermione shrugged, "I didn't read your owl."

"Why not?" He demanded.

"Because... because... I don't know why... ok?" She threw her hands in the air before turning away and starting to pace. "You're Theo's best friend, Draco! Your allegiance is to him. Besides, you made it clear you liked it that I was married. You liked having a married

submissive who would make no demands and have no real hold over you.’ She laughed without humor... “News flash! I’m getting divorced!”

Draco watched her, a stunned expression as he absorbed what she said. He asked, incredulously, “You think... you think I don’t want you anymore?”

She swallowed and turned towards him. His look was heated as he quickly approached her and pushed her against the wall. He crashed his mouth to hers as he grabbed her hand and pulled it down to the hard bulge in his jeans. He pulled his mouth off hers and whispered, his breath caressing the delicate skin below her ear, “Does this *feel* like I don’t want you?”

He kissed her again, softer this time. After a minute, she pushed him away. “Draco... stop. I can’t do this right now.” He stepped back from her, his skin slightly flushed with arousal.

She sighed. “Look, I... I can’t think straight right now, ok?”

They were silent for a minute. Her eyes moved back up to his. “Did you know? Did you know about Daphne?” She asked tentatively, fearing his answer. His silence and unaltered expression told her all she needed. “You bastard,” she whispered.

He shook his head, his tone slightly defensive. “Granger, I didn’t know until very recently and I didn’t find out from Theo. He never told me about any of it until today.”

She felt sick. “But you knew! You knew... and you didn’t tell me. Is that why you pursued me?” Her look was venomous.

He exhaled, his hands on his hips, watching her... willing her to understand. He brought his voice down a notch, speaking softly. He needed her to calm down. “Astoria let it slip... by accident, that Daphne and Theo had a thing. I didn’t know any of the details. I asked, and she wouldn’t tell me. I swear! I knew very little, and I only found out recently.”

She was silent, staring at him. He had not answered her question fully.

He swallowed. He didn’t want her slipping away from him. He needed to tread carefully. “Yes, the knowledge that Theo was...” He paused. “Hermione, I’ve wanted you since Hogwarts. I’ve told you this! While Theo was fucking Daphne at Hogwarts, I only had eyes for you. When I trained with Rudolphis, it was always *you* who I imagined. When I was with other witches I wished they were you! And yes... when I found out about Theo, it... it was a relief. Because...” his voice became softer. “Because, it meant I could finally go after what I always wanted.”

She shook her head. “Why didn’t you tell me about Theo, Draco? Why did you let me carry that guilt?” She paused and continued. ‘I was so hell bent on him not finding out because I didn’t want to hurt him. I didn’t want to harm my marriage.’ She took a breath and sighed, her voice barely above a whisper. “I had so much guilt and you let me feel that guilt... knowing he was cheating on me!” She slid to the floor, her voice reeking of despair, “Why didn’t you tell me?”

He crouched before her, his voice soft. “Hermione, I didn’t know enough about it. I didn’t know the extent of his relationship with her.” He paused. ‘You told me you loved him, Pet... I didn’t want to hurt you. And... despite what he’d done... Theo loved you. I knew that he loved you.’ He sat down in front of her. His voice was pleading. “I would have told you if I had known the extent of what was going on.”

They were silent for a minute. "I'm sorry, Hermione. I should have told you. In hindsight, I handled it wrong... and I'm sorry."

Neither one said anything for a couple minutes. They just looked at each other, his look one of pleading, hers of anger.

She couldn't help the rage that was building up inside of her. "Tell me, Draco." Her tone became sarcastic. "Excuse me, tell me, 'Sir'." She made air quotes when she said 'Sir' and rolled her eyes.

He shook his head. His tone one of warning. "Careful, Pet."

"You think I'm still your Pet? Are you kidding?" She let out a humorless laugh. "You said you were going to take care of me! Soo, tell me... is your idea of taking care of me, hiding the truth from me? Letting me suffer guilt and humiliation? Was that... enjoyable for you?"

He stood up and looked down at her, his anger overshadowing all other emotions. "You're being unfair, Granger." He shook his head. "I told you I didn't know the extent of what was going on. I've also apologized. It's Monday and this whole thing between us started Wednesday. If things had continued the way they were headed between us, I probably would have told you." He let out a growl in frustration, running his hands through his hair before walking away from her, sighing with exasperation. He walked to the window, staring out but not seeing anything.

She slowly stood, realizing that she was pushing him away, and suddenly dreading the loss of him as well. "Draco, look. I'm...I'm a mess. I... I." Suddenly tears were streaming down her face and she let out a sob. He looked back at her, his face collapsing from anger to concern.

He dashed to her in four large, quick steps and pulled her into his arms. He peppered the top of her head with kisses as he whispered. "Oh, Baby... shh... shh. Please don't cry. It's going to be ok. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry."

She wrapped her arms around him and let him hold her. He slid to the floor and pulled her onto his lap. She curled up in his arms, welcoming his warmth, his masculinity, his smell...

He held her tight and rocked her as he whispered softly. "I told him, Granger. I told him he was a fool. I told him he would never meet another witch like you. Daphne isn't half the woman you are... much less half the witch. I told him I had always wanted you. I told him I was going to pursue you."

"What?" Hermione asked him with stunned disbelief. She looked up at him, her mouth falling open. "What did he say?"

"He didn't say anything. He attacked me. He tried to punch me, but I ducked and punched him in the gut." He swallowed and looked down at her. "Don't you see, Pet? It's always been you."

She continued looking up at him, his grey eyes soft and focused on her brown. Her tears stopped, and she continued watching him. When need suddenly overtook sense, she kissed him. He froze for a beat and then kissed her back urgently. She wrapped her arms around his neck and turned to straddle him.

He pulled his wand out of his pocket and cast a cushioning charm on the hardwood floor before laying her back onto it. He nuzzled her neck and planted soft kisses up her neck, over her jaw and to her mouth as his hands began to explore her. He whispered. "Tell me now if you want me to stop."

His words brought her back to the here and now. "Stop," she whispered, breathlessly. He pulled back from her, hesitantly and swallowed heavily, willing himself to maintain control.

She looked into his carnivorous eyes. "I want to, Draco. I really want to... but, I can't. I just can't." She shimmied out from under him and jumped to her feet.

He let out a heavy sigh and rolled onto his back.

She started to pace, ringing her hands. He sat up and watched her.

She looked back at him, her face one of concern. "I'm sorry, Draco. I shouldn't have kissed you. I...I want you... badly, but I need some time. I need to... absorb everything that's happened." She swallowed, contemplating everything he had just said to her. Her voice was soft, slightly hesitant. "Draco, I'm confused. I thought you just wanted me as your submissive. You're talking like you want... more."

He stood. His look became smoldering. He grinned, walking towards her. "Ohh, Pet. I want your submission, without question I want your submission! But that's not all. You see I've figured something out. You're the only witch for me. These past few days..." He swallowed. "I want you... all of you. Your submission, yes... but whatever else you have to give... I want that as well." His voice had become soft, sultry.

Her eyes were locked on his, unsure how she felt about his confession. At this very minute she wanted to give in to him. She couldn't deny her attraction to him and her desire for him. But she knew she wasn't thinking straight and she didn't trust that she wasn't just rebounding from one snake to another.

She shook her head. "This is... this too much for me to process right now. I need... time."

He reached out and stroked her cheek with the back of his hand. "Whatever you need. I'm not going anywhere."

She smiled up at him. "Yes, you are. You are going home. And I'm going to bed. I'm beat."

He smirked down at her. "Hmm, you don't look beat to me. I can do something about that, you know."

She smiled, shaking her head and rolling her eyes as she pushed him towards the door. "Very funny. Go home. I'll talk to you..."

"When?" he interrupted.

She smiled softly. "I don't know, Draco. Just give me some time to figure things out."

He turned back to her as he was about to walk out. His eyes went from adoring and soft to controlling and predatory. "You're mine, Pet. You know it... and don't think for a minute that I'll let you forget it." He kissed her on the head and then walked out the door.

Chapter 15

As she brushed her teeth and absently looked at her reflection, Hermione couldn't help but think about Draco. She still didn't know how he had found her. After all, she had just moved in to her new place today. In truth, she shouldn't be surprised. A man with his wealth and connections likely found it very easy to track someone down.

She turned off the bathroom light and climbed into her transfigured bed. It wasn't very comfortable. She needed to go furniture shopping. As she stared at the ceiling, her thoughts drifted to Theo. She didn't want to think about him and his betrayal, however his letter kept coming to her mind. She turned towards the open suitcase on her floor where she could see the letter poking out the side. She rolled to her other side and closed her eyes. Maybe she would read it tomorrow.

Tomorrow came fast. She felt like she had just closed her eyes when the sun so rudely crept into her bedroom and into her eyes. *Add draperies to your list.* She yawned as she slid out of bed and went to the bathroom before realizing not only did she not have coffee, but she had no coffee maker and no groceries. After a short debate with herself, she decided to take another day off work. In the four years she had owned her business, yesterday had been the first sick day she ever used. She refused to let herself feel badly for taking another.

Since she didn't have an owl, she threw on a pair of jeans and t-shirt and left the apartment, Apparating to her office. She left Lizzy a note and then went to the store. It was only six-thirty in the morning, but it was open and was empty except for the checkout witch. She magicked a cart to follow her, levitating the needed items as she made her way up and down the aisles. An hour later her cart was overflowing with not only food items, but a coffee maker, teapot, some cooking pans, plates, utensils and cleaning supplies. She really had nothing at her apartment. She was beginning to regret having left so much behind. She had just restocked the refrigerator a couple days ago and all that food would probably spoil. Theo couldn't make toast, much less cook himself a meal. *Maybe Daphne will cook for him.* Hermione felt her stomach drop at that thought. Theo had always loved Hermione's cooking. *Maybe he loves her cooking more. He clearly loved her submission more.* Stop it, Hermione! She internally scolded herself. She would not let herself wallow in self-pity and doubt. *You are made of tougher stuff. It's his fucking loss... not yours!* Her internal voice said the words with purpose and conviction, her subconscious willed her to believe them.

Once back at her apartment, she put the groceries away and made her first pot of coffee in her new home. It tasted divine. As she sat on her kitchen floor, enjoying croissants with jam, she realized she would probably like living alone. She would no longer have to be on a dinner schedule. She could eat when she felt like cooking or when she felt like eating. She would no longer have to clean up after anyone but herself. She could listen to her music instead of the damn TV. As a matter of fact, she wouldn't even buy a TV.

She had just finished eating when there was a knock at her door. She was thrilled to see Ginny and Susan who had come by to go furniture shopping with her. They spent the morning hitting several shops, including some antique stores where she found some really great deals.

Within four hours they had furnished not only her bedroom and living room but had handled the eat-in kitchen and rooftop terrace as well. The only room she had left was the guest room and the dining room which she was now leaning towards actually using as a dining room and not a library, after all. She had bought two beautiful, antique, floor to ceiling bookshelves that looked gorgeous in her living room. One bookcase was situated on each side of the fireplace. The first thing she did was put all her beloved books away.

By one o'clock, the witches were starving and decided they deserved a fabulous meal after all their hard work. They went to a quiet French Bistro in muggle London where they spent the afternoon drinking bottles of wine and feasting on delicious cuisine.

Hermione had grown very fond of Susan over the years. She was tough as nails and cussed like a sailor. She was blunt, but not in a mean way. She cut to the quick of a problem and told it like it was. "All I'm saying is, you can have some revenge, Hermione. Perhaps some hair loss inducing tonic on his pillow? Some itching powder in his boxers? Cockroaches in his cereal?" Hermione laughed as she listened to Susan's creative musings and had to wonder how the witch had ever been sorted into Hufflepuff.

Susan took another sip of her wine before she whispered, "tell the husband, Mione. Adrian Pucey has the right to know his wife is a common trollop. Make the bitch's life miserable."

Hermione shrugged. "I don't know, Susan. I honestly don't care if she's miserable or not. She didn't cheat on me. Theo did. He's the bastard. If it hadn't been her, it probably would have been another."

"Regardless, wouldn't you want Adrian to come to you and tell you if he had found out and you still didn't know?" Ginny asked with the voice of reason.

Hermione conceded the point. "Yes... yes, Ginny. You're right." She looked from Ginny to Susan. "I'll think about it. Right now, I wish I could just forget about all of it."

When she got home, which wasn't until after four, she finished arranging her furniture and putting her personal photos and items away. It felt good to get them out of the boxes. Her apartment was starting to feel like a home.

She walked into her bedroom and realized she had forgotten to buy curtains. She really hated the morning light robbing her of her last hour of sleep. She took a couple pillowcases and transfigured them into window dressings. They weren't perfect but would do until she could purchase what she needed.

She changed for bed and stared at the suitcase. She had put her clothes away in her new dresser but had left Theo's letter and Draco's owl post in the luggage.

Pulling them out of the suitcase, she sat on the side of her new bed, debating. A part of her wanted to burn Theo's letter and never read it. It would serve him right. But then she might not ever get the answers that the letter might contain. She wanted to understand why he had strayed. Not that it would make a difference, but it was eating at her to know why. Perhaps she had done something to push him into the arms of another? *Perhaps he's just a slimy, scheming snake who never really loved you.* She collapsed back on her bed. *If that's the case, then why did he marry you? For social advantage maybe?* Theo's father had been a Death Eater and the Nott's reputation had been tarnished after the fall of Voldemort. His marriage to her had improved the Nott's standing tremendously. Perhaps Theo had married her for that

vey reason. If Hermione Granger, the golden girl, loved him then maybe... Hermione stopped that train of thought. It was too painful to think he had used her in such a way. That would have meant she was truly blind and naive. *The bastard cheated on you for five years, there's no question you're blind and naive.* "Stop it, Hermione!" She scolded herself.

She stared at the letter and after another heavy sigh, she opened it. Tentatively, she unfolded it;

My Dearest Hermione,

It is very hard to put into words what I want to say. I should start by thanking you for opening this letter and reading it. It's probably been in your possession for a couple days before you opened it. I know you so very well, love. That brings me to my second thought. I love you. I know my actions scream something else entirely, but I love you so very much. My world is upside down without you. When I told you that I loved... well, you know what I said in your office yesterday. You need to know, I love you more. Soo much more... If I had it in my power to choose, I would choose you. You are the woman I want to have children with, grow old with... spend my life with.

So, I know you want to know why. Why did I do this to you... to us? Truly, it was temporary insanity that spiraled out of control. When it started, you were working long hours and I was spending a lot of time on my own. That's not a complaint and I'm not blaming you for my failure, but I guess I was lonely. You were fierce, Kitten. I was so proud of the work you were doing at the Ministry. I would not have interfered or pulled you away from the wonderful progress you were making for anything... But one Saturday afternoon, you were working, and I was at the library when I ran into her. I hadn't seen her since about a year before I married you. She and I had a tumultuous relationship at Hogwarts and it continued for about a year after graduation. It was a relief when I finally ended it. But when I ran into her at the library that day, she was so happy to see me. She had always acted like the sun rose and set with me.

At the time, I think the attraction was simply that she needed me, and you didn't. It felt so good to be looked at like I was the most important person in the universe. She had always looked at me that way... and where it had become a turn off and a bore before, leading me to break it off with her, it felt very different to me after having been married to Hermione Granger for two years. My beautiful, brilliant Hermione who needed no one because she took care of everyone else and solved everyone's problems. It was my ego that had missed being stroked that led me astray. I'm ashamed to admit it.

I'm also ashamed to admit that the reason I stayed with her all these years, is because soon after it started, she began threatening to tell you... or tell her husband, which would have amounted to the same thing, if I left her. After my second attempt to end it, she threatened to kill herself. She had always been fragile, but whenever she would feel me start to pull away, she would go crazy and throw around all kinds of threats. I won't lie and say that I contemplated coming clean with you. I never did... because I knew you would never forgive me and you would leave me. Your finding out was not an option... ever! So, I kept her as satisfied as I could. Mental fragility and illness runs in her family. Her sister, Astoria as well as her mother all suffer from it to varying degrees. I was always on edge from fear she would do something that would either lead to you finding out or lead to her coming to harm.

I have been such a fool, Hermione. If I could take back the last five years and do them over, she would have no part in my life. I do love her, but just not the way I love you. I realize I've lost you forever. I know you'll never come back to me, but if by some miracle you find a way to forgive me, even enough to just talk to me, or just not hate me, I'd consider myself the luckiest wizard alive.

I also owe you an apology for neglecting you... sexually, as well as intellectually. I don't know how many of the journal entries you read, but in the beginning of my affair, when I was the most delusional, I let Daphne guilt me into pulling away from you sexually. After a few months, I pulled away not because of her influence, but because every time I looked into your eyes, I hated myself. Making love to you was painful because the love I saw in your eyes, made me hate myself more and more. I withdrew from you in so many ways. Instead of staying up late debating the merits of a new ministry decree or discussing a book we were both reading, I withdrew to the mind numbing and distracting world of muggle television. I could get lost and not think about anything else. I could ignore and not think about what I was doing, the betrayal I was committing.

I broke it off with Daphne today. I'm finally free of her. She has nothing to hold over me anymore. You've already left. I encouraged her to check herself into St Mungo's for emotional and psychiatric help. I care about her and love her enough to wish her peace and happiness. But regardless, I never want to see her again. Seeing her reminds me of what a fool I was.

I have so much more I want to confess, so much more I want to explain. What was really going through my mind last Tuesday at dinner, for instance. It's just too much to put into a letter and frankly, more than you probably want to know right now. But I'm here and promise to be honest and forthcoming if you ever want to know more.

I'm so sorry, my darling, darling, Hermione. You deserve all the happiness and if you ever need me for anything, I'm here for you. I will always love you, and always want you, even if I don't deserve you. I've boxed up more of your things that you left behind. I know you didn't leave your favorite Gryffindor scarf behind on purpose! Feel free to come by anytime to get them, whether I'm home or not. I haven't changed the locks or the wards. This is still your home.

Yours, now more than ever,

—Theo

Hermione folded the letter and put it in the drawer of her bedside table. On the one hand she was grateful that his letter was so forthcoming, but on the other hand, it could all be bullshit. She would never be able to trust anything he said again. She would think more on it later. The letter didn't make her cry. She was cried out. And, truthfully, she was starting to feel much stronger again. She was already liking living on her own. There was only one thing that would make it perfect, and she planned to take care of that the next day.

The owl post Draco had sent her Sunday evening was still sitting on her bed, waiting to be read. She tore open the envelope.

Granger,

I stopped by your place this evening. I was shocked when Theo told me you had left him. He's a mess and won't tell me anything. He told me to come back in the morning, so that's what I'll do. But I'm worried about you. Are you alright? He said you were at Potter's. I almost came over there but thought better of it. Owl me tomorrow. I need to see you and know that you are ok. I'll come looking for you if you don't, Pet. You know I will. Do as I say... -D

Hermione rolled her eyes at his bossiness, but in her heart of hearts it was one of the things she liked about him. It spoke to that same part of her that craved his Dominance when he was with her. But she wished she didn't crave it. After reading the journals and after everything she had been through, a big part of her just wanted to walk away from Draco, D/s, and anything else that reminded her of Theo. She needed to put all that behind her; be single, focus on her work and enjoy her friends. She knew she was preaching the right mantra to herself, but the question was, could she do it? What she felt she needed to do, didn't necessarily match with what she wanted to do.

She turned her light out and closed her eyes. Unfortunately, she had too many thoughts whizzing through her brain to relax. She pieced the time frame together. She left Theo on Saturday. Theo had brought the letter to Harry's Sunday morning. Draco had stopped by Theo's on Sunday evening only to discover she had left. That's when he sent her the owl. Then, Draco went back to Theo's on Monday and spent time with him before coming to find her. Now, it was Tuesday. That was a lot to have happened in a short amount of time.

It had been three days since she had laid eyes on Theo. She hadn't gone more than a day without seeing him in the eight years they had been together. Strangely, she didn't miss him. As his letter pointed out, he had basically been absent from their marriage for many years. And all those years she had struggled, trying to make it better, thinking maybe she was doing something wrong. *What a waste of time and energy.* She took a calming breath. She didn't want to be angry. Anger and tears got her nowhere. She was just glad Theo Nott would soon be out of her life. She was done with him. The quicker the divorce, the better.

Chapter 16

Hermione was greeted by Lizzy's bright smile when she arrived at work on Wednesday morning. The beautiful, grey haired witch followed Hermione into her office. "I take it you are feeling better, Hermione?"

Hermione turned back towards her, giving her a small smile. "I am, thank you, Lizzy. Can I just have a few moments? Then we'll go over what I've missed the past couple days."

"Sure, I'll make some tea." Lizzy left Hermione's office, closing the door behind her.

Hermione wasn't prepared for her reaction to being in her office again. She had felt so mentally strong this morning, as though she was already over it all. But walking into her office, to the very room where she had learned of Theo's betrayal, caused it all to come crashing back, hitting her like a bludger. She clearly wasn't as over it all as she had convinced herself.

She suddenly felt cold, the hairs on her arms standing up. She pulled the sweater from the hook on the back of her door and slid it on, not caring that it completely clashed with her dress. She forced herself to proceed to her chair and sit. She looked at the large desk in front of her. The surface was now clear, but she could clearly picture the journals laying open before her. Of course, Theo had taken them. She hadn't expected to find them still sitting on her desk, but somehow their absence was jarring, disturbing even.

She opened her bottom right drawer and tucked her purse inside. She exhaled slowly before looking up again. Her eyes went to the various pictures she had of Theo around her office. As she scanned them over, she couldn't help but to equate when they were taken with whether he was still only hers or whether they were taken after he had started his affair. The picture on her desk, for instance, was taken last Christmas at Harry's. She picked it up and tossed it into the trash.

Her eyes next went to the framed picture on the wall that was taken under a palm tree with a setting sun and an ocean behind them. That one was taken in Hawaii on their two-year anniversary. It was just prior to his affair, if he had been telling the truth. She stepped closer to the photo, focusing on his blue eyes which twinkled as he looked from the camera down at her and back up again. His smile was radiant and looked genuine. She took the picture down and tucked it in the corner, for some reason not wanting to throw it out.

The next one was taken when they were dating. They were standing on the grounds of Hogwarts, the beautiful castle behind them. The school had erected a memorial honoring all who had perished in the battle against Voldemort. The dedication of the memorial and the unveiling of the completed renovations had been that day. Hundreds of witches and wizards attended. It was Theo and Hermione's first date to a public event. It created quite a stir that Hermione Granger was dating not only a Slytherin, but the son of a Death Eater. She pulled that picture down as well and tucked it with the other.

The next frame contained a collage of pictures. Theo was in some of them, but mainly it held pictures of her with friends. She left that one alone and walked to the last picture of her with Theo. It was taken three years ago while they were on vacation in the US. He would have been about two years into his affair. She was standing in front of him and he had his arms around her. They were smiling at the camera with the Grand Canyon behind them. She took the picture down and tossed it into the trash with the one that had been on her desk. In her eyes, her marriage had only been real prior to his affair, so everything that he had said to or done with her the past five years was a lie, a false life.

She looked at her desk and then took another glance around the office. She felt a change was in order. With a wave of her wand, the furniture in her office moved around. Her desk, no longer in front of the main window, was now on the far side of the room, under the window that faced the alley. She moved her credenza to rest under the main window, instead. She would need to put up new pictures and put up a fresh coat of paint, a different color... Perhaps something a little brighter.

"Lizzy, I'm ready to go over everything when you are," she said as she poked her head out the door. Lizzy smiled and carried the tea tray into Hermione's office. As she entered, her pace slowed as she took in the changes of the office. Her eyes not only went to the re-arrangement of the furniture, but to the pictures in the trash can as well. She now understood what was going on.

She sat the tray down and poured Hermione's cup. "I like the changes in here," she said as she handed her young boss her tea.

Hermione shrugged. "I needed a change." She looked up from her tea into the concerned and knowing eyes of the older witch. Hermione spent the next 10 minutes filling Lizzy in on an abbreviated version of what had happened.

"I'm so very sorry, Hermione. Please let me know if there is anything I can do," she said kindly and genuinely.

Hermione nodded. "Thanks, Lizzy. So, tell me what I missed the past 2 days?"

Hermione didn't like talking about Theo and the impending divorce. But she knew she needed to tell Lizzy and she was glad the discussion was behind her. It was a relief when Lizzy started talking about work and what had been going on in the office. It was wonderful to have something else to concentrate on and think about besides her divorce.

The rest of the day flew. She spent her time catching up on missed correspondence. She began to think about Moxie. She needed to talk to Rita to see if Rita had uncovered anything that would help with Moxie's case. She asked Lizzy to set up a meeting.

Before she knew it, five o'clock had arrived. She was excited as she headed to the Magical Menagerie. She walked in and looked around the room at all the birds, owls and cats. The tall, elderly owner walked over, using his cane to assist. He smiled down at her. "So nice to see you again, Miss Granger. What can I help you with today?"

Hermione chewed her lip as she looked around at all the animals. "Well, I'm ready for another companion. Dear old Crookshanks passed away last year."

“Crookshanks... Oh Yes!” The elderly wizard clearly remembered the old half-kneazle. He looked around at all the creatures as if in thought. Suddenly his eyes lit up. He looked back at Hermione. “Follow me, young lady.”

Hermione followed him towards the back of the store. “This beauty was brought in last week.” He gestured towards a large cage. Inside was a huge, stunningly beautiful, solid grey, long hair cat with golden eyes. “She’s a Maine Coon Cat.”

“She’s gorgeous,” Hermione said softly, walking towards the cage. The grey feline was stretched out, lounging, as though she were a creature of royalty watching Hermione approach. As soon as Hermione was close, the graceful animal stood and stretched. Hermione gasped at how large the cat was, not to mention how beautiful. “What’s her story?” Hermione asked, not taking her eyes off the creature.

“Well, I don’t know much about her. Her name is ‘Cassiopeia.’

Hermione smiled. “How long has she been here?”

“She was dropped off about a week ago. No explanation was given. It was a house elf that brought her. He just said his Mistress didn’t want the cat anymore.”

Hermione spoke softly to the grey beauty who was watching Hermione intently. “Hey there, Beautiful. Would you like to come home with me? It’s just me, but I promise to take very good care of you.” Hermione could swear the cat understood her and was debating whether or not Hermione was worthy. She smiled, liking the cat even more. Cassiopeia slowly sauntered to the edge of the cage and lightly nuzzled Hermione’s finger.

Hermione turned back to the elderly wizard. “I’ll take her.”

Hermione was thrilled. She brought Cassiopeia home and the cat adjusted easily. It felt good to have a companion and to not be alone. That evening Hermione was reading in bed, when the giant creature hopped up onto the bed next to her. This was the first time since she brought her home, that Cassiopeia had initiated any interaction with Hermione. Hermione hadn’t forced herself on the cat. Instead she told the grey beauty that when she felt like company to come find her. Cassiopeia laid close to Hermione, her large tail flicking back and forth as Hermione smiled down at her. “I know your name is Cassiopeia, but that’s a mouthful, so I’m going to call you Beauty most of the time.” Hermione stroked the cat’s neck and was rewarded with a rumbling, loud purr.

The rest of the week went quickly. Hermione continued to feel stronger emotionally as time passed, but she still had moments where she became upset. It would hit her in occasional waves. She was fine when she was in her apartment, as there was nothing there to remind her of him. But when out and about, there were memories at practically every turn. She would walk by a restaurant they had enjoyed together or a book store. Those were the moments she would feel weak and feel her emotions getting away from her. She was good at keeping her reactions internalized. Anyone with her or watching her would never know she was crumbling on the inside. But as the week progressed, those spells hit less and less frequently.

Friday night rolled around, and Harry was insisting she come for dinner. She politely declined, eager to spend her first Friday night in her apartment. She had just put on some muggle music and opened a bottle of wine when there was a knock on her door.

She couldn't help the flicker of excitement and pleasure she experienced when she looked through the peephole and saw Draco waiting impatiently. She had been trying not to think about him and trying to forget about him, as she knew would be the healthiest thing for her to do, but she found herself missing him all the same.

She opened the door and he didn't say anything. He just stared at her, his look intense. She raised her eyebrows willing him to speak. He rolled his eyes and sighed heavily, pushing past her into the apartment. "Please, do come in, Draco," she said sarcastically.

She closed the door and looked at him, expectantly. He finally spoke, irritation in his voice. "Why haven't you contacted me this week? I haven't seen you since Monday!"

Hermione looked at him incredulously. "I told you I needed time!"

"Is that what you call this? Time would have been twenty-four hours, Granger. This hasn't been time, it's been an eternity!" His gaze went from her eyes to her feet and back up again. A small twitch to his mouth told her he was trying not to laugh or smile. A small grin escaped as he asked, with a slightly teasing tone, "Granger, what are you wearing?"

She looked down at herself and sighed in exasperation. A pink blush flushed over her pale skin. *Brilliant!* She had on huge pink, bunny slippers with Wonder Woman pajamas. She took a breath and squared her shoulders, "Clearly, I wasn't expecting company! If my attire offends you so much, you can just leave," she snapped.

He continued to smirk. "I don't think I've ever seen you look more adorable. You look like a little school girl, getting ready for bed." His grin grew wider. "Want me to tuck you in?" He started to stalk towards her, a playful and sexy gleam in his eye.

Her heart started to race, as she backed up, her eyes locked on his. *Merlin, he's hot! Get a grip, Hermione!* "It's a little early for bed," she responded, trying to maintain her resolve.

His knowing eyes were piercing as he continued to move towards her, slowly. Her breath hitched when her back hit the wall with a small thud. His smile morphed back into a small smirk as he towered over her. "Is it? One can never get enough sleep," he whispered, leaning down, breathing her in, his hands against the wall, on either side of her head.

She could feel herself succumbing. "Oh... no, sleep is now bad for you. It was a new study I read in *Witch Weekly*," she teased back up at him. Suddenly his mouth was on hers, his strong body pressing up against her. His hands moved to her face, not letting her turn away or resist. His tongue demanded entry. She moaned, giving in to him, her hands tracing up his strong arms to his shoulders and finally to his silky, platinum locks. Her nails brushed his scalp eliciting a feral growl as his mouth moved to her neck where he feasted on the tender and sweet tasting skin. His kisses softened and trailed to her collar bone, his hands dropping to her shoulders and then to her waist, sliding under her pajama top where he caressed the smooth skin of her lower back.

Realizing she needed him to stop, she pushed against him, sliding out from between him and the wall. He exhaled, his palms flat on the wall, his forehead tapping it. He took a deep breath and turned back towards her.

"Granger, why are you fighting this? You want me, I know you do."

Hermione walked to the bottle of wine and grabbed two glasses, pouring some into each a glass. She turned back towards him, his expression expectant, waiting for her response. She handed him his glass and took a sip of her own before answering. "Draco, I don't think a relationship with you is a good idea." She felt sick the minute the words left her mouth. They felt and sounded so wrong.

His expression remained unchanged and commanded further explanation.

She shook her head. "I want you, but it all feels... I don't know, kind of incestuous."

"What?" He demanded. "Why do you say that?"

Hermione rolled her eyes, "I think it's pretty clear. You're Theo's' best friend, you were married to the sister of the woman he's been having an affair with for five years! He's married to me, at least for now, and now you and I..." She turned away, taking another sip.

"Finish your sentence, Granger." His tone was sharp, commanding.

She turned back towards him and laughed. "That... right there! Your Dominance, your bossy nature... yes, it turns me on. Yes, I...I want it, but it just feels like, it feels like Theo all over again!" Her expression softened and her voice lost its edge, "or at least similar to what I had with him. You're much more... well, he only acted the role in the bedroom. What you want is..."

"Granger, you can't live your life avoiding what you like to do because it reminds you of him." He put his glass down and looked at her like she wasn't understanding a very simple principle. He laughed, without humor as he ran a hand through his hair. 'So, what... you going to give up eating as well? Because, you know... you used to eat with him. And, books... I guess you're going to stop reading because Theo works in a library.' He shook his head, "Oh, and"

"Stop, stop," She interrupted, waving him off. "You've made your point." She didn't want to look at him. She could withstand him, if she just didn't look at him. She could feel his eyes on her, pulling her.

He could see her resolve was slipping. "Come here, Pet." He studied her, her internal battle written all over her face. "Don't make me say it again."

She swallowed as she looked up into his prurient stare. *God's, I want him.* And that was the simple truth of it. There was no point in denying it and there was no use in fighting it. It was a battle she would never win. She had no more ability to resist him now than she had the week before. She was a fool for trying. Her eyes were cast down as she walked towards him. When she stopped in front of him, he tilted her chin up, drawing her fawn brown eyes to his steely grey.

He leaned forward and planted a soft kiss on her lips before pulling back. "Stop this, Granger. It's a done deal. You're mine and you have been since last week. I'm not going to hurt you. I'll never lie to you. I'll take care of you... physically, emotionally... all of it." He paused, his face suddenly vulnerable. "Just, for Merlin's sake, stop all this resisting. You're making yourself miserable and you're making me crazy. You know I'm right. Just, go with what's in your soul, Pet. Go with what you feel."

"Ok," she answered, barely above a whisper.

“Ok?” He asked, not sure he heard correctly, and praying he had.

She looked up at him, defeated but her eyes were pleading. “I can’t fight this, Draco. I... I don’t *want* to fight it anymore. I don’t want to have to be strong.”

Before she could finish her sentence, he bent down and scooped her up into his arms, carrying her bridal style. She rested her head on his shoulder as he carried her, finding his way to her bedroom.

He set her down on the edge of the bed, neither one saying anything. She looked up at him, her chestnut gaze soft and compliant.

He stepped closer to her, so that he was standing between her legs. His eyes never left hers as he quickly unbuttoned her top and slid it off. Tossing it aside, he whispered “Lay back, Pet.”

She rested back onto her elbows as he pulled off his t-shirt. Her focus scanned down his perfect chest and she began to sit up, wanting to touch him. “No, Pet.” He reprimanded, gently. Her eyes went back his. They were dark, lust filled and fierce and she began to tremble with need as she swallowed heavily and laid back down.

He swallowed heavily as he noticed the goosebumps on her skin and the tightening of her nipples. He pulled his wand out of his pocket and waved it, causing her body to slide further onto the bed as her wrists were enveloped with soft restraints, tied together into a single bind and fastened to something over her head. She pulled on them to no avail causing her breasts to jiggle. She froze when his pupils dilated like a beast going in for the kill. *Death by sex, well there could be worse ways to go.*

Draco drank her in. She was a vision, restrained and at his mercy... just as he liked her. His eyes scanned roguishly from her beautiful face to her round, full breasts to her flat stomach where the elastic band of her pajama bottoms rested. He couldn’t help the grin and chuckle that overcame him as he continued to scan down her body where his eyes finally rested on the huge, pink bunny slippers. He slipped them off her feet and tossed them on the floor beside him as he climbed on the bed and hovered over her. He kissed her, hard, his tongue brutal with its need to consume her mouth. He swallowed her moans as she arched her back while he massaged her left breast. His lips moved down her neck and his hands slid down her body, grabbing the elastic band of her pajama bottoms and knickers, making quick work of pulling them off. On his knees, and straddling her legs, he grabbed her hips and flipped her over onto her stomach. Merlin, she loved how he man-handled her so easily.

Hermione’s heart was racing as his strong hands grabbed her hips, lifting them into the air. Her knees fell forward and he set her back down so that she was now on her knees and elbows, her bottom in the air and on display. She felt a hard and unexpected slap to her right bum cheek, a loud squeal of surprise escaping her. “That was for making me wait a full week,” he snapped. She couldn’t contain her groan of need when she felt fingers stroke her and slide in and out of her sopping heat. She let out a keening mewl, her words muffled, “Draco, please...”

“Ahh, so ready for me, my little pet.” Instantly he buried himself in her and began to thrust in and out with an urgent and savage need. ‘You... are... mine... mine... mine,’ he chanted as he continued to slam into her. A hand slid up her back and grasped the back of her head

before grabbing a fistful of hair. He pulled her head back with each thrust, causing her eyes to roll in sheer bliss, his brutish actions pushing her further towards her peak. The familiar coil in her womb was tightening as her climax was building. “mine... mine... mine,” he continued to claim with each thrust, causing her head to whirl as she realized the words were truer than they had ever been.

“Say it!” He demanded, continuing to piston in and out of her.

“I’m... yours!” She managed to get out breathlessly and as the words left her mouth, the coil sprung free and she was overcome with contractions of mind numbing pleasure. She felt him tighten within her before he stilled and let out a feral growl.

One hand still fisted in her hair and the other still holding her hips in place, she found she couldn’t move. She felt him slowly slip out of her as his grip on her hip loosened and he released her hair. In an instant, the hungry and carnivorous beast transformed into a gentle lover, soft kisses peppering her back as warm hands gently caressed her skin. He tilted her so that she fell onto her side. He collapsed next to her, facing her, her hands still retrained over her head.

His eyes were dark, his expression stern. One of his hands was stroking her still hardened left nipple. “Say it again, Granger.” His voice crisp, demanding.

Her doe eyes stared into his smoldering grey. “I’m yours.” She whispered, with a sincerity that came from the depths of her soul.

He narrowed his eyes. “I’m yours, what?”

She swallowed, her heart pounding at the thrill of the look in his eyes, and demand of his voice. “I’m yours, sir.”

He let out a slow exhale. “Don’t forget it.” With a flick of his wand, which had been lying next to him, her wrists were released. He gingerly pulled her arms down and began to rub first her shoulders and then down her arms. He kissed her wrists tenderly before rolling onto his back and pulling her closer so that her arm and leg draped over him.

“You’re mine as well, you know,” she whispered, sleep about to claim her.

“Oh, Pet. Truer words were never said.”

She let out a sigh of contentment, nuzzling up closer to him and resting her head on his shoulder. He smelled of masculinity and sweat and sandalwood and she relished the closeness. He turned his head towards her and kissed her forehead, tenderly. For the first time in years, she felt not only desired, but truly cherished. Exhaustion overcame her, and she drifted off into a deep slumber.

She woke a few hours later to the feel of Draco slipping away from the bed. “Draco, where...”

He whispered, “shh, I’m coming right back, just need to use the loo.”

A minute later, she felt the bed dip. She reached out to find the warm and luxurious fur of Beauty. The feline cuddled up next to her and she stroked the cat’s cheek gently before stroking around her ears with light fingertip brushes. Beauty didn’t like to have her belly rubbed, Hermione had the scratch marks to prove it. The familiar sound of the deep, rumbling

purr caused Hermione to smile. She was just starting to doze again when she was awakened by the sound of Draco's voice.

"What in Merlin's name is that *beast* doing here?"

Hermione's eyes shot open to the confused and shocked look on Draco's face. She continued to pet Cassiopeia, looking up with bemusement at the blond. "This is my new companion, Cassiopeia. But I call her 'Beauty.'" She leaned forward and kissed the feline's head.

Draco's look almost made Hermione laugh. "Granger, that cat is a menace! She's vicious!"

Hermione pulled her cat closer. "You don't even know her! What are you talking about?"

He shook his head, adamantly before setting down a glass of water onto the bedside table. "I do know that cat and it *hates* me!"

Hermione was confused. "What, what do you mean?"

He sighed heavily. "That *demon* spawn, which you are holding like a sweet teddy bear, attacked and killed one of my fathers prized white peacocks!"

Hermione's jaw fell open. "Cassiopeia belonged to your family?"

Draco nodded. "My mother. She loved that cat... positively *adored* her. But father finally persuaded her to get rid of it after the peacock massacre."

Hermione pinched her lips closed. She knew she shouldn't laugh, but it all just sounded so ridiculous. She looked down at Cassiopeia. "Beauty, did you do that? Did you kill a peacock?"

Cassiopeia had a haughty look on her face, Hermione recognized it as a look of pride. She leaned down and kissed the top of her cat's head. She looked back up at Draco and said dismissively, "Well, there are no peacocks here. So, nothing to worry about."

She maneuvered the huge cat up and over her so that Beauty was now lying behind her. Hermione raised her eyebrows expectantly at Draco. He sighed heavily, realizing this was a battle for another day, and climbed back into bed.

Hermione nestled up next to him. He wrapped his arm around her and sulked, "I have scars from that beast. She used to jump out and attack my ankles every time I went down the stairs."

"Well, there are no stairs here... oh, except for the rooftop terrace stairs." After a pause, she continued. "I'm sure if you are nice to her, she'll be nice to you."

Draco continued to pout and then grumbled, just as Hermione was about to drift off, "I better wake up with all my appendages."

Chapter 17

The bed was empty when Hermione awoke. She yawned and stretched before forcing herself to sit up. She felt like she could sleep another hour, but she was curious where Draco was. Looking around she noticed Draco's shoes with pajama top lying next to them. She climbed out of bed and headed into the bathroom. Three minutes later she had an empty bladder and a clean mouth. She went to her dresser and pulled out a t-shirt and a pair of shorts before heading to find the object of her desire. She walked into the empty kitchen noticing the fresh pot of coffee and poured herself a cup. She put a scoop of Beauty's food into the cat dish before continuing her search for the elusive Slytherin. Not finding him on the sofa, she headed to the only place she imagined he could be. Once at the top of the winding, corkscrew steps, she found Draco sitting on one of the cushioned chairs, drinking his coffee.

She internally shook her head at the impressive sight before her. How was it he could look so damn sexy this early in the morning? He literally screamed sex appeal. Faded jeans, bare chest and bare feet. *Yummy*. As she approached him, his gaze moved from the notepad on his lap to her eyes. He gave her a small smile.

"Good, you're finally up," he said with a hint of teasing impatience. He gestured towards the chair next to him. "Sit," he commanded, his eyes going back to the notebook on his lap.

"Good morning to you as well," she grumbled as she fell lazily into the chair he indicated. "You know, it's not even seven-thirty yet, and it's a Saturday. It's not like I slept in for Merlin's sake."

"Whatever, Granger. Listen, we have things to discuss," he replied dismissively.

She rolled her eyes. "Draco, can I please wake up a little before you go all bossy on my ass." Not looking at him, she looked up to the morning sky. It was overcast, but warm and breezy. She closed her eyes and breathed in the fresh air.

He smirked. "Ohh, Granger. If you think this is bossy, you are in for a rude awakening." He looked back down at the notebook on his lap. "So, first off, what's going on with your divorce?"

She responded with irritation and impatience, "I filed on Monday. Smithers says if Theo doesn't fight it, I'll be divorced in a month, which is actually three weeks from now." She closed her eyes, picturing the May calendar. 'So, today is May 10th, 2008.' Before she was able to march the dates out in her head, she froze with the realization of the significance of today's date. She felt a flush of nausea and a cold sweat come over her. Barely above a whisper, looking down at her hands in her lap, she acknowledged, "today is my seven-year anniversary."

Draco didn't know what to say. He knew what he wanted to *do*. He wanted to take her into his arms and show her how insignificant that fact was. Make her glad there wouldn't be an 8th anniversary. Make her forget Theo ever existed. But he didn't. He just watched her.

As if on cue, the doorbell rang. "I'll be right back," she said quietly. She dashed down the steps with Draco not far behind, sensing trouble. He was just coming to the bottom step when Hermione opened the front door. It was exactly as he feared. Theo was standing there with flowers, looking at Hermione like she was air and he was drowning.

"Hermione," Theo whispered, his voice raw.

She didn't say anything. She started to close the door, but he threw his hand out to hold it open. "Please, kitten. Just talk to me. Please." Sensing another's presence, Theo's eyes shot from Hermione to where Draco was standing, his face falling even more, which Draco hadn't thought possible.

Theo's eyes scanned Draco's state of undress, his eyes growing wide and his face turning red. "You fucking Bastard." He forced his way in, past Hermione and was in Draco's face after a few long strides. His tone was threatening, full of rage. "She's my *wife* you asshole," he raged as he shoved the blond. Draco was able to hold his ground by grabbing the stair railing to keep from falling. He straightened up and forced himself not to push back.

He kept his face and demeanor calm, not wanting the situation to escalate out of control. Meeting Theo's eyes, his voice was deliberate but not loud. "I'm sure you realize she won't be your wife much longer."

Theo stared at Draco, the rage on his face slowly morphing to pain. Draco swallowed, uncomfortable seeing the anguish on his friend's face.

Theo stepped back from Draco and placed the flowers, which somehow remained in his hand and unscathed, onto the table beside the sofa. He took a slow deep breath and turned back towards Hermione. "Hermione, can I just talk to you... alone. Please?"

Hermione had her arms crossed in front of her, wanting to be anywhere but where she was at that particular moment. She spoke softly, her voice slightly shaky. "Theo, I don't think I'm ready to talk to you. Not yet."

He watched her for a minute and didn't say anything. His breathing began to pick back up, his hands clenching and unclenching at his sides. "You aren't ready to talk to me, but you're ready to fuck him." It wasn't a question, it was a statement said with animosity.

Her eyes lit up with suppressed rage as she snapped in response, "I don't think you have any room to find fault with that, Theo Nott." Her anger escalated, and words started to tumble out of her mouth, suddenly finding she had a lot to say. Her voice became stronger, her eyes meeting his for the first time since he had noticed Draco. "Five years, Theo. Five years you've been fucking another witch. I've only been with Draco since the Wednesday before I left your sorry ass."

Theo's jaw fell. "What? What the hell, Hermione? We weren't separated yet!" He took a step back from her, like she was diseased.

This only made her angrier. "Oh Theo, I was a fool. I stuck by your side... bloody... fucking... miserable for *years*!" Her voice was getting louder. She started to stalk towards him. 'I was sexually unsatisfied, emotionally abandoned, intellectually bored and yet I stuck with your cheating ass for five years because I fucking loved you, *you asshole*.' She was finally standing right in front of him, her angry brown eyes boring into his shocked blue. He

took a step back, swallowing heavily. “But I couldn’t take it anymore, Theo. I was lonely, and I was ripe for the picking.” She looked back at Draco, passion in her eyes, fueled by the fury surging through her.

She looked back up at Theo, her words venomous. “Draco came along when I needed him most... and guess what? I’m not lonely anymore, Theo.” A small, wicked smile crept over her mouth. ‘And I’m definitely not sexually frustrated.’ Her eyes were gleaming. She wanted to hurt him and knew just the words to do it. “He Dominates me, Theo.” She bit her lip, and threw her head back, closing her eyes as though remembering something particularly delightful, a moment of ecstasy. Theo’s eyes grew wide at her wanton display. She gazed back at him, her eyes lit with passion and lust. Her words came out slow and sultry. “He makes me feel soo good. He *knows* how to satisfy me. He *knows* what I need... and he’s *man* enough to give it to me.” Her eyes did not break eye contact, refusing to be the one to look away first.

He stared open mouthed at her, shocked by her words, but quickly realizing she was lashing out. Regardless, he felt like he’d been punched in the gut all the same. His heart was pounding with frustration, his ego demanding she acknowledge and remember how good they were sexually. He drew himself up, becoming the Dominant he had been in the beginning, the Dominant who used to make her heart race. He slowly stalked towards her. “Oh kitten, you forget how good we were together. You forget how I can make you feel. I can be that for you again. I *want* to be that for you.” He swallowed and took her face in his hands. His voice no longer demanding, but soft and pleading. “I love you Kitten. It’s my fault you ended up in his bed. I know that. I only have myself to blame... but I love you. I really... love you, and I’m sorry for hurting you. I’m sorry for betraying you. I’m sorry for letting you down. But I promise, if you just... if you just give me another chance. We’ll take it slow... I’ll court you again. We can date and rebuild, only this time it will be even better. I promise!”

Hermione pulled his hands away from her face and stepped back from him, shaking her head, sadly. Her was rage gone and her heart was breaking at his words, his words that were not enough. Her voice was soft and begged him to understand. “Theo, it’s over. It’s been over. Don’t you see? I will *never*, ever come back to you. I will never trust you again. I will never respect you again.” Her words were not said with the intention of hurting him. Her anger was gone. She simply wanted him to understand. “I’m no longer yours, Theo. I’m not your wife except on paper only. You need to agree to the divorce I’ve initiated and move on with your life.”

She turned away from him and walked towards Draco. She smiled softly at the blond and then turned back to Theo. There was silence as Theo looked from Hermione to Draco and back at Hermione again. She added in a soft voice as she stared in his pained face, “Benny Smithers should have delivered the papers for you to sign.”

Theo looked down at the ground. His shoulders slumped with defeat and the realization that she really wasn’t going to give him another chance. He had known it was a long shot. He shot a look of hatred at Draco, convinced If Draco wasn’t in the picture he might have had a chance.

Draco was uncomfortable witnessing what had just taken place, but he couldn’t help the small thrill that pleased and stroked the ego of the Dominant within him. His witch had made it clear that he satisfied her and made her happy.

However, Draco had also lost his best friend and he felt a resounding sadness on Theo's behalf. He spoke kindly and without condescension, "Theo. I'm sorry. I'm sorry about all this. But I've wanted her since our third year at Hogwarts. I never would have moved in on her if she were happy or if you hadn't strayed. I wouldn't have done that to you. But the truth is, you lost her long before I came along." He paused. Theo's expression was blank and his eyes dull. "I'll make her happy, Theo. I'll take care of her in every way. If you love her, then let her go."

Hermione couldn't help the tear as it slid down her cheek. It was all too much. She waited for Theo to lose it again and attack Draco. Surprisingly, he didn't. He sighed after Draco stopped talking and looked back at Hermione. "Ok... I'll sign the divorce papers," he said, barely loud enough to hear.

Hermione let out a small sob as Theo stepped towards her and pulled her to him. He wrapped his arms tightly around her, holding her one last time. He kissed her on the head. "I'll always love you, kitten. I'll always be there for you." With those final words, he turned away and walked out her door.

Hermione stared at the now closed door, tears streaming down her face. "Here," Draco whispered, handing her a tissue. She wiped away the tears, offering him a small smile of thanks before walking to the sofa where she sat next to her cat who had apparently slept through the whole confrontation. Draco tentatively walked around and sat on the coffee table, facing her. "You ok, Pet?"

She looked from the floor up to his grey eyes and answered truthfully, "not really, but I will be." She leaned back on the sofa absently looking at him as she stroked Beauty's fur. "I shouldn't have said what I said to him about us. It was cruel and not like me. He may have cheated on me, but I don't think he did it to hurt me. He's never done or said anything to intentionally hurt me, but I was cruel and hateful and."

Before she could beat herself up anymore, he interrupted her. "Hey, hey... stop that! I think... I think he needed to hear it. You needed to be honest... and frankly, he deserved it. Don't think for a minute he didn't. You told him you weren't ready to talk, and he forced you anyway. He has no one but himself to blame for pushing you to the point of unleashing your pent-up anger at him."

Her eyes focused on the handsome blond before her. He was witty, smart and gorgeous and he was crazy about her. Her voice was shy as she asked, "Why do you like me, Draco? You keep saying you've wanted me since our third year, but I don't understand why?"

Draco paused, scratching his chin before answering. "It's complicated. You were... forbidden fruit. You were everything I was supposed to hate, and believe me, I convinced myself I did hate you. But underneath all that, in my deepest self? I knew you were what I wanted. Smart, no scratch that," he smiled. "You were a brilliant witch. I loved your fire. I loved how you fought and never gave up or gave in to anyone or anything." He paused, as if remembering. "In third year, when you punched me? I wanted to punish you. I was too young to really understand what that meant. But looking back, I was going through puberty and my hormones and desires were wrecking me. I jerked off so many times thinking of you, and that was just third year." He smiled. "Then came the bloody Yule Ball! Holy hell, Granger. I

thought you were the most beautiful witch I had ever seen. I was so jealous of Krum. It only got worse as the years progressed.”

He stood and slid on the sofa next to her, the opposite side of Beauty, taking her hand in his. He continued, his voice soft. “When sixth year came around, and I was training with Rodolphus, I was with a lot of witches... A lot of submissive witches, but also witches who just liked kink. Rodolphus had a ravenous sexual appetite so he didn’t only engage submissives. He had a penchant for finding witches who were into all kinds of things. But for me, something was missing. I would be spanking a blonde, but would be imagining a full head of bushy, brunette hair. I would look into her soft blue eyes as she sucked me off and imagine your brown ones instead.” He took a deep breath and when he spoke again his voice was shaky. “That day, that day you, Potter and Weasel were brought to the manor, I panicked. I didn’t know what to do. When Bellatrix started to...”

Hermione squeezed his hand. “Hey, hey... we’ve already covered this, you’ve already apologized, and there is *absolutely nothing* you could have done that wouldn’t have gotten yourself killed.”

He wrapped his arm around her and pulled her close. “Well, you haven’t heard this part. While it was happening, while she was torturing you, I stepped out of the room and told Rodolphus I wanted you. I told him I wanted you to play with and to please stop Bellatrix from destroying my toy. He had looked at me like I was crazy, and I think he was contemplating what he could do to secure you for me from his evil, psychopathic wife.” Draco drew in a breath and blew it out slowly, “But thankfully, you escaped. I was so relieved, Hermione. You have no idea how much I have been haunted by that day.”

Hermione didn’t want Draco feeling guilty. She had not meant for their conversation to go down this path. There had been enough heartbreak and regret expressed in her apartment this morning. She knew what would help him, and it would help her as well. She slid out from his arms to the floor, kneeling in front of him.

He was silent for a minute, absorbing what she was offering. “Pet, you don’t have to...”

She interrupted him, “I want to.” Her eyes shot up to his. “Please?”

He still didn’t move, watching her. Hermione could tell he was aroused by the growing bulge in his jeans. But she knew he was concerned about her. He probably thought she was in too fragile a state of mind but in truth, she wanted to escape from her thoughts. She just wanted to feel.

She looked at him, a come hither look in her eyes. “Please, Sir. May I suck your cock?”

That did it. He swiftly unbuttoned his jeans and slid them down his hips, freeing his large, hard member quickly. He looked at her intensely, with his panty wetting Dominant stare. “By all means, Pet.”

She leaned forward and licked her lips before slowly and delicately taking him into her warm cavern. His breath hitched followed by a loud hiss as she started moving her encompassing lips up and down his length. He was too big for her to take all the way, so she used her hands to stroke him, following the same rhythm as her mouth. She remembered what he said about imagining her brown eyes instead of the blue ones of the blonde witch all those years ago. She looked up at him as she moved up and down his length, her tongue caressing

him. His eyes were glued to hers before his lids fluttered and his head fell back, his jaw falling open.

He swallowed before choking out, "I'm going to come, Pet. Swallow it. Swallow it all."

She began to move faster and felt him harden just a touch more before warm spurts pulsed into her mouth and down her throat. She held her lips on him as he rode out his climax, then cleaned him with her tongue as he became still.

She fell back on her knees and looked down at the ground, continuing to offer her submission. She needed this. She didn't want to have to think about anything or worry about what she should be doing. She wanted to forget about Theo, work and her divorce. She just wanted to be taken care of. For a little while. Let someone else be responsible. Of course, she wasn't sure if this was what Draco wanted. Did he need to leave? Did he have plans?

Draco watched his witch for a minute, contemplating her. She clearly needed him right now, needed his Dominance. He was thrilled. He had nowhere to be and there was nowhere he would rather be. "Stand up and follow me," he said quietly. It was time to begin her training and they needed to renegotiate their agreement. Now that she was single, it was a whole new game.

Chapter 18

Thanks for reading and reviewing!

Hermione followed Draco to the kitchen. He turned back towards her, tilting her chin up, chocolate eyes once again meeting grey. He spoke softly. "Sit, I'm going to make breakfast."

She began to move around him towards the stove. "Draco, I can..."

He grabbed her arm, her surprised orbs whipping back to his. His tone no longer soft, his gaze was intense and his expression expectant. His voice was not loud, but the bite was there all the same. "Did you not just offer me your submission, Pet? It seems we need to redefine the rules and parameters of our... agreement." His eyes moved from hers back towards the chair.

She swallowed heavily as she obeyed and settled into the seat. She opened her mouth to respond, but he silenced her with another look. "I'm going to fix you breakfast. You are going to eat every bite and then we are going to talk. We are going to re-evaluate and discuss where we go from here." He watched her, daring her to argue.

She looked down, conceding to his will. He was right. She had initiated this. She had kneeled, willing him to take control and she had best let him have it. As much as she wanted to relinquish control, it did not come easy.

Draco walked to the fridge, pulling out eggs, cheese, tomatoes and onion. She watched as he placed everything on the cutting board. His back to her, she couldn't help as her gaze watched his bare back. It was smooth, his muscles defined. Just the simple movement of chopping onion and tomato causing the muscles of his shoulders, arms and upper back to ripple lightly. She watched his long fingers slice and chop the ingredients and recalled what those very digits had done to her body. She squirmed slightly at the memory and her arousal continued to escalate as she imagined what they might yet do to her. *Get a grip, Hermione!* She reprimanded herself. She should be feeling regret, guilt even, but not arousal. She had just given Draco a blowjob, not minutes after Theo left. But strangely, while sad, she didn't feel regret and she didn't feel guilt. She felt relief.

Theo now knew.

He now knew she had been with Draco before she left him.

He now knew she was still with Draco, and he now knew she would never go back to him.

She held no more secrets. Nothing to be ashamed of. She didn't realize until this moment how freeing that would feel.

Beauty pranced into the kitchen and rubbed against Hermione's legs. She reached down and stroked the cat behind the ears and down her back. Hermione noticed Draco sneak a peek at the feline and then shift his feet a little. She waited for the cutting remark to come, insulting her new familiar, but it never did.

She hated not doing anything. “Can I do something to help?” He didn’t respond. “Please? I need to be doing something.”

He turned back towards her, his eyes no longer intense, but soft. “Pour us some juice and set the table.” His tone was not quite as soft as his eyes, but she found it didn’t bother her. *Isn’t this what you signed up for?*

As she set the table, she pondered where their discussion would lead them. Sure, she was single now, but that didn’t mean she wanted to be Draco’s 24/7 submissive. She could never agree to that and if that’s where he thought they were headed, he was going to be sorely disappointed. But what did she want? She liked having Draco around, she wouldn’t deny that. But it wasn’t just his Dominance that she enjoyed.

His sleeping over last night had been particularly nice. He had held her most the night and the intimacy had been welcome. She hadn’t been held while she slept in years. He was attentive during the night as well. Adjusting the blanket over her to be sure she was warm enough yet making sure she didn’t get too hot as well. She had enjoyed his attentions, even in her half-asleep state.

She grabbed the pumpkin juice from the fridge and poured two glasses. *You’re rebounding, Hermione*, she told herself. Was she though? She had turned to Draco before her marriage had ended. The desire and attraction she had for him had started before she left Theo. *Submission and sex, Hermione! That’s what you had signed up for. But this... this is different.* She sighed. *Yes, but it feels right!*

Her internal struggle was interrupted when strong hands gently wrapped around her waist pulling her back into a firm and muscular wall. “Relax, Pet. Stop worrying.” She immediately felt the tension within her start to ebb away as she leaned back into him, his strong arms engulfing her.

“How did you know I...”

His voice was soothing, his breath on her neck caressing. “As I’ve told you many times, Pet. I know you. I could sense your tension from across the room.” He kissed the tender skin under her ear with a featherlight touch. ‘You’re wondering if this is a mistake, aren’t you?’ He whispered. Before she could answer he spun her around and kissed her. His mouth was devouring, his hands grasped her bottom and then up her sides, to her neck and to her face, where he held her as he pulled back. “This isn’t a mistake, Pet. This is what should have always been. You’re mine.” He kissed her again, more gently this time. “Now, let’s eat and then we’ll talk.”

He turned away and walked back to the stove, grabbing the pan and putting half the omelet on each of their plates. “Sit,” he commanded.

She sat down, staring at the plate he placed in front of her. She really wasn’t hungry.

“If I have to feed you, I will.” She looked up into his determined expression. Hesitantly, she picked up her fork and began to eat. After a couple bites, she realized how hungry she really was, and it didn’t take her long to finish. She even finished before he did.

She looked at him expecting to see a smug expression, shocked to find his look more contemplative than anything. His eyes went from her face to her empty plate and then back up

again. "Would you like more? I can make you another omelet or something else?"

She slowly shook her head, "No."

He cocked his eyebrow. "No, what?"

"No, sir." She responded, realizing that he was merely following through with what she had started, and she found she respected him for it. He didn't become distracted and lose focus. He was maintaining the Dominance she had asked for.

He stood and walked around the table, reaching his hand out to her. "C'mon, Pet. Let's go back upstairs." He noticed her uneasy expression as she looked around the dirty kitchen. After a short pause, he said, "Janky", his eyes on hers. Immediately a house elf appeared.

The haughty house elf bowed low. "Yes, Master Malfoy, sir?"

Draco sighed. "It's ok, Janky. You can behave normal around Hermione."

The elf straightened and beamed at Draco and then at Hermione. His expression and countenance had completely changed from snooty to adoring as he looked up at Draco. "Janky is happy to be called by Draco. Janky was worried when Draco didn't come home last night."

Draco smiled warmly at the elf. "Janky, you don't need to worry about me. I promise." He gestured towards Hermione. "This is Hermione Granger. You might be seeing a lot of her..."

Unable to contain his excitement, the house elf interrupted Draco and smiled widely up at Hermione. "Janky knows all about the young Miss Hermione Granger! Janky read all about her in Kreacher's autobiography;" Born to Serve and Lessons on Purity."

"Kreacher wrote a book?" Hermione exclaimed.

Janky beamed up at her. "Oh yes! Kreacher tells all about Hermione Granger and her work to secure elf rights. He tells of the young miss's friendship with Harry Potter and Dobby and even Kreacher himself! Hermione Granger is brave and good!" The house elf bowed before her.

Hermione was stunned. She turned to Draco, who was rolling his eyes. "Janky, Hermione doesn't want you to bow to her any more than I do! As you should know from reading that book!"

Janky straightened up, continuing to look at Hermione with awe. Draco cleared his throat. "So, Janky, would you mind cleaning this kitchen? I realize it's not my flat and if you are too busy, I won't be upset or angry. I don't want you feeling overwhelmed and I will, of course, add a knut to this week's pay for the inconvenience."

The delight and joy on Janky's face was so overwhelming and evident that Hermione didn't have the heart to fuss.

Draco continued, "in return for this task, I command you to take the evening off tonight and do something that you want to do for yourself. You are to try to have fun and are not to think about me and what I need. I will be perfectly fine for one night. I will look forward to

seeing you tomorrow as I will have missed you and will want to hear all about what you did tonight.”

Janky bounced in excitement on his feet. “Janky will do as Draco say’s and will seek out Tootsy, helping her with her chores so that she can finish early and spend time with Janky.” The house elf said it all so fast that Hermione barely understood a word, but Draco understood perfectly. He would have to owl his mother to give Tootsy the night off as well.

All of a sudden there was a high-pitched squeal. Janky leapt back and then jumped behind Draco’s leg as Beauty sauntered into the room, her head and tail held high.

Draco sighed heavily and reached down, picking up the terrified house elf. If Hermione was shocked before, it was nothing compared to seeing a house elf being held in Draco Malfoy’s arms. “I know Janky, I practically had the same reaction when I saw her last night,” he said resignedly.

Hermione looked back at her cat, suddenly wondering if the cat truly was a menace. The way Draco and now Janky reacted to her was alarming... and yet funny at the same time. “Janky, why are you afraid of Cassiopeia?” Hermione asked the house elf, tentatively, not sure she wanted to know the answer.

The house elf began pulling on his ears as he nervously looked from the cat to Hermione and then back again. “Beast likes to jump onto Janky from behind corners and knock Janky down. Cat likes to torment Janky and knock dishes out of janky’s hands so thats they break. Beast is a baaaaaad, baaaaaad kitty.” Janky made a face at the swanky feline as he said the last part. Beauty merely stretched and yawned, clearly bored with the whole exchange.

Hermione bent over and picked up her familiar. “Beauty, you are to leave Janky alone! Do not scare him, do not touch him and do not hurt him! If you in any way make him unhappy or uncomfortable, I will shut you up in the bedroom whenever he is here.” The cat resisted being held and quickly fought her way out of Hermione’s arms, retreating from the kitchen back towards the living room.

Hermione looked back towards to Janky. “Janky, if Beauty in any way taunts you, scares you or hurts you, you have permission to use magic on her to make her stop. You do not have permission to hurt her, but you can use magic to restrain her or block her from your person if you need to.”

Janky beamed up at her. “Kreacher was right about young miss. Hermione Granger is kind and good and...”

With that, Draco put the house elf down. “Ok, ok, Janky. Thank you for your help. Hermione and I are going upstairs. I will see you tomorrow, Ok?”

The house elf looked up at him, “Yes, young master, Draco sir.”

Draco sighed, “Just Draco, Janky. Just Draco. You don’t need to address me formally when others aren’t around. You know this!”

“Yes, Draco. Janky still forgets. Janky will beat his head against the stone mantle.”

Draco responded, kindly but firmly. “No Janky! You are not allowed to punish yourself! Ever! It’s ok to make mistakes. Everyone makes mistakes and you will not punish yourself

for making them.”

Janky nodded quickly and nervously up at Draco. It was obvious Janky was having a hard time letting go of old practices.

Draco looked back at Hermione, reaching his hand out to her. “Come,” he commanded, his tone less than patient.

Hermione took his hand, surprised by how he could go from sweet and adoring towards his house elf to commanding and Dominant towards her in a matter of seconds. The irony of the situation was not lost on her and she couldn’t help the small giggle that escaped her.

She followed him up the winding stairs, his pace quick. When they reached the rooftop, Hermione was disappointed to find it was drizzling. Draco waved his wand, transforming one of the wrought iron tables into a huge canopy, protecting them from the light rain, yet allowing them to enjoy the fresh air.

He gestured for her to sit. She sat as directed, letting out a small sigh. He sat and looked at her before clarifying, “so this conversation is just Hermione and Draco, ok? Not Sir and Pet.”

Hermione nodded. “Yes, I think that would be best.”

He continued. “So, while you were sleeping in this morning, I was looking over the original rules I showed you before. I’ve tweaked them a bit to what I feel would be appropriate in our current situation. The limits I left alone. I’m assuming none of that has changed.” He looked down at the parchment. “I just need to add something. He picked up the pen that was next to the notebook and parchment and began to write. After a minute, he put the pen down and handed her the parchment.

Submissive behavioral expectations while in the presence of the Dominant:

1. Submissive will obey Dominant at all times as long as his demands fall within the confines of this agreement
2. Submissive will not speak unless spoken to.
3. Submissive will refer to Dominant as ‘Sir’, unless given leave otherwise.
4. Submissive will not look Dominant in the eyes unless given permission.
5. Submissive will dress as Dominant requests.
6. Submissive will use agreed upon safe word if at any time she wishes the scenario or activity to stop.
7. Submissive will be monogamous and will not engage in any sexual activities with anyone other than the Dominant.
8. Submissive will communicate to Dominant any concerns, needs or desires during agreed upon times of open discussion. She will remain respectful during these conversations.
9. Submissive will offer her complete submission one agreed upon weekday evening per week from 5:30pm until 10pm. She will also submit from 8am Saturday morning until 8am Sunday morning every weekend.

10. Should submissive desire to change or alter agreed upon times or days of her submission, she will respectfully submit a written request, no less than 12 hours before agreed upon appointment.

11. Should submissive desire extra time and attention from her Dominant, she will submit a written request, or she will appeal to the Dominant in person. She will understand and not feel uncared for or unappreciated if Dominant is unable to meet her request. If appealing to the Dominant in person, she will offer her submission by kneeling at his feet in an agreed upon posture and position.

Dominant behavioral expectations while in the presence of submissive;

1. The Dominant acknowledges that the submissive chooses to yield power, and therefore the ultimate control lies with her. Without her consent, the Dominant holds no power over her.

2. Through the power yielded to him, the Dominant will strive to meet the submissive's need to relinquish control in a safe environment. The safety of the submissive will be paramount.

3. The Dominant will strive to meet the submissive's sexual, physical and emotional needs and desires. To meet these needs, in addition to other means at his disposal, he will punish and/or reward the submissive as he sees fit.

4. The Dominant will respect the limits of the submissive, avoiding all hard limits and pushing soft limits in a way the Dominant deems appropriate. Limits will be re-addressed at periodic intervals as trust builds between the parties.

5. The Dominant will communicate and will allow the submissive to communicate any concerns, needs or desires during agreed upon times of open discussion.

6. The Dominant will not engage in any sexual activities with anyone other than the submissive.

7. The Dominant will cherish the gift of submission and recognizes the trust the submissive has bestowed upon him. He will never take advantage of that trust or abuse his power over the submissive in any way.

8. Should Dominant desire to change or alter agreed upon times or days of her submission, he will let submissive know in writing, no less than 12 hours prior to agreed upon time.

8. Should Dominant have need of the submissive outside of agreed upon times, he will submit his request in writing or appeal to her in person. He will understand if the submissive is unable to meet his request and will not punish her or rebuke her in any way. If appealing in person, he will address submissive as 'Pet' instead of her given name and will offer a command. If submissive follows command, she is accepting his Dominance. She will, *respectfully*, decline his request if she is unable or unwilling to meet his request.

Hermione put the parchment down after reading it. "You didn't change much. But I like that there are specific time frames."

Draco nodded, enthusiastically. "Yes, and I liked how you offered your submission this morning by kneeling. So, I added that." He paused before adding. "But, I need to show you how I expect you to kneel."

She looked up at him in surprise. "You have a specific way you want me to kneel?"

He grinned. "Oh, Granger." A small devilish grin crept over his face. "I have all sorts of 'specific' ways I want you to do... 'specific' activities."

Hermione gulped. She was at a loss for words, too lost in his sultry tone of voice and his sexy promise to form a complete and coherent thought.

His eyes raked from her eyes down her neck, to her chest and down to her thighs before coming back up again. "For instance, how you are sitting?" He shook his head slowly. "When you are serving as my submissive, and I have given you permission to sit in a chair in my presence? You will sit up straight, knees together, ankles crossed with your hands clasped on your lap. Your back will not slouch or come in contact with the back of the chair. In short, you will sit just like a prim and proper pureblood witch would sit at tea time."

The indignation on her face was instantaneous. "Oh, no!...I will not in *any* way do *anything* that makes me appear to..."

He interrupted her. "Ah, ah, ah," he reproached, shaking his head. "You will." He smirked.

After a minute he explained something that was obvious to him, but perhaps not obvious to her. "Granger, you realize the pureblood witch is raised with the understanding that she will *obey* her husband? She is raised with the understanding that her role is to *please* her wizard, provide him with heirs and attend social gatherings as her social standing dictates? She is taught how to sit, what she can talk about at social functions and more importantly, what she can't. Her desires are always her husbands, at least in public. In short she is submissive." He chuckled at her expression of disgust and continued. "Yes, I know. You would never stoop to such an existence."

"No, I would not! How can..."

He didn't let her finish. "Before you get carried away with witch's rights and the indignation of living to serve a man, think about what you are craving. Think about that basal, primal instinct and desire that you are struggling to meet."

"Draco, the two are not related! I crave occasional Dominance, but I don't crave oppression!"

He shrugged. "It's all just varying degrees of the same thing. Sure, you want to work, measure your success by your own accomplishments and not your husband's." He smirked at her, knowingly. "But when the work day is done? And you've come home, what is it you crave, Princess?"

She stood up, glaring down at him. "Draco Malfoy, are you claiming that all women have a basal need and desire to submit?"

He didn't hesitate. "Well, yes. Again, in varying degrees."

She shook her head at him. "Merlin, you're a misogynist!"

He laughed. "Uh, no. *Definitely* not. I don't dislike or despise women. I *adore* women, particularly the sexy, hot headed witch standing in front of me right now."

She reached down and grabbed the rules that were now sitting on the table, pointing at Dominant rule #7. "So, my submission isn't really a gift to be cherished after all? I mean if it's in my nature, and I'm just..."

He stood up, towering over her. "Granger, you are blowing this way out of proportion and you are misunderstanding my point. Your submission *is* a gift. I will cherish it, just as I cherish you. You are giving in to a primal instinct that you could fight. You could deny the very thing you crave because it disgusts you. You could deny me for any number of reasons. The fact that you *choose* to be stronger than that, the fact that you choose to submit, is a far greater gift because it means more. Don't you see, your struggle is a huge part of the gift. Pureblood witches... they bore me because they lost that fight by the time they marry. At least most of them anyway."

She leaned forward in the chair, shaking her head, her fingers lightly pressing her temples. "You're giving me a headache."

He sighed as he crouched before her. "You ever wonder why purebloods were so threatened by half-bloods and Muggleborns?"

She looked up at him, curious. She responded. "Because we threaten their existence, we bring to question their magical superiority."

He stood and began to pace. "Well, yes there is that. But what is really threatened is their way of life. The muggle world is much more progressive. In the magical world, it's just now becoming acceptable for witches who have children to work. And even then, it's expected they only work part time. Pureblood wizards like their witches subservient and at home. Half-bloods and Muggleborns threaten tradition. They bring modern, muggle ideas into magical society."

Hermione held her hand up, interrupting him. "Enough. Enough." She sighed and then met his eyes with her own. "Draco, why in the world did you leave Astoria? Wasn't she a perfect little pureblood witch?"

He sighed heavily and sat in the chair. "No, well, yes. She was a proper pureblood wife, but she didn't make me happy. She was subservient, but she wasn't submissive per say. She lived to please me, but asking her to kneel? She would have never understood that or gotten off on it. It would have scared her fragile ego." He answered the question before Hermione could ask it. "Again, Granger, varying degrees, and varying needs. Women crave and/or need different aspects of submission. Some need more than others, some just want the bedroom kink, some don't want any kink at all but just want to serve their husbands."

"Draco, you are *wrong*! Ginny Potter, for example, doesn't have a submissive bone in her body! She is a prime example of a witch who has no basal submissive instinct. And I can guarantee you she wasn't raised to be subservient to Harry!"

Draco suddenly looked uncomfortable. He looked away, his face turning a little pink. "Well, it's not importa..."

Hermione interrupted. "Draco Malfoy, what are you not telling me?" He wouldn't look at her. "Tell me, right now!"

He sighed, peeking back at her. "Fine, but don't tell her I told you. We swore we would never tell anyone."

Hermione's jaw dropped. "You and Ginny?"

He nodded. "It was... brief. Potter had dumped her before running off with you and Weasel." He paused and continued. 'We were at Hogwarts, dealing with the Carrows and all that insanity. It was... difficult. I was in the throes of my training with Rodolphus. Ginny and I... we, we ended up in the room of requirement one night. We were both looking to hide, for different reasons. Anyhow, we both arrived at the room at the same time. We fought over who had rights to it and ultimately agreed to share.' He scratched the back of his head. "It was a long night, and I might have used my gifts of persuasion to ease into her good graces and by the end of the night... her knickers."

Hermione stared at him, dumbfounded. After a minute, "ok so, you had sex. What does that have to do with her being submissive?"

He shrugged. "Well, I gagged, blindfolded and spanked her. She kneeled and did everything I demanded." A cocky, signature Malfoy smirk crept over his face. 'She loved it. We even had a repeat three nights later. But that was it. Just those two nights and neither of us ever mentioned it again. It was like it never happened.' He grinned, "but I promise you, that witch definitely has basal submissive needs and desires. And if Potter isn't meeting them, then she's probably a very unhappy witch."

"I can't listen to any more of this this." She started rubbing her temples again.

"Fine, it's not important anyway. It doesn't matter if you agree with me about women's primal needs. What matters, is that I meet *your* needs. What matters is that I meet your desire to submit so that my primal desire to Dominate can be satisfied. I don't care about what other women desire or why they desire it. Maybe my theory is wrong. I don't care if I'm right or wrong, Granger. I only care about you... us."

Hermione relaxed at his words. She didn't agree with him, but what did it matter? It all came out to the same thing. She picked up the rules again. "These are fine. I agree to your rules."

She looked up to find him smiling brightly at her. "But," she continued. "I will only submit as is written here. Other times we are together, it's just Hermione and Draco. I will exercise my free will."

He leaned back in his chair. "Of course." He studied her, his voice slightly raw, hesitant almost. "Granger, you realize you are more than a submissive to me? I've told you this, but you need to hear it again. I'm crazy about you and I want whatever you have to give."

She swallowed. "I think, I think I want that too, Draco. My brain is telling me it's too soon, I'm not even divorced yet. But the reality is... I think I'm ready to move on... with you. I really like you, and... well, I liked you sleeping next to me last night. It felt... right." She bit her lip as she looked up at him.

He reached his hand out to her and she took it, a small smile on her face. He tugged her, gently pulling her from her chair to his lap. She leaned back against him. He kissed her

forehead. After a moment of silence, she reprimanded him, gently. "You know, Draco. Janky deserves more than just a knut for cleaning the mess we left in the kitchen."

"Relax, Granger. That elf has more galleons in his account than most wizards. I've been paying him in galleons for over 7 years, now. I only told him knuts because he wouldn't accept more. He likes being free, but he hates taking money. So, I pay him much more than he realizes. I doubt he's ever spent any of it. I doubt he even knows how much money is in his vault. It doesn't matter anyway. I'll always take care of him. Just like he has always taken care of me."

Hermione couldn't help the joy his words brought her. All her hard work for elf rights was paying off. There were many elves who chose to be owned. But because of her efforts, many elves were now free and worked for wages. It pleased her that Draco was paying his elf and paying his elf well. He also treated his elf with kindness. This was all she wanted.

After another minute, Hermione felt strong hands rubbing her leg, up her hip, to her breasts where those strong hands began to massage and rub. "So, Pet. You realize it's Saturday, right?"

Chapter 19

Thanks so much for reading and reviewing! Same disclaimer as before, I own none of this!

This chapter has a Lemon that is consensual but plays like it's non-con. If this is a trigger for you, just stop reading when it starts. You'll be able to tell when to stop reading.

"So, Pet. You realize it's Saturday, right?"

Hermione didn't say anything. She was internally debating whether or not she was physically and mentally prepared to play the submissive role for what would almost be 24 hours straight.

Draco, sensing her hesitation, continued to rub her arms and then wrapped them around her, holding her tenderly. "Is it too soon?" He asked softly.

A feeling of insecurity and self-doubt began to wash over her. *Can I really do this? This is much more than an hour in the bedroom!* She began to fidget, her legs becoming restless.

Strong hands landed on them, holding them still. "Don't fidget, Pet. Answer me. Talk to me. Tell me what you need." His tone was gentle, but his words demanded an answer.

When she still didn't answer, he grabbed her hair and pulled the top of her head back, exposing her neck. It was almost painful, but not quite. He held her like that, his mouth at her ear. "Why are you so quiet all of a sudden?" He nibbled at her jaw.

"I... I'm nervous, ok? What if I can't do this for such a long stretch of time."

She felt him smile as he continued kissing her jaw and her neck, playfully biting. His grip on her hair relented as he whispered, "Oh, Pet. When have you *ever* failed at anything?"

"My marriage." She replied, barely above a whisper. She felt him pause.

He rested his chin on her shoulder. "Hermione, you can't view your divorce as a failure. Divorce is..."

She let out a "Hmpf," interrupting him. "I failed Theo when I deserted him to my work and he ended up in the arms of another witch."

Draco's voice was suddenly stern and full of conviction. "No. His affair was not your failure, it was his. He was the one who strayed without talking to you and being honest. He was the one who didn't ask for or demand from you what he needed." He paused. His voice softer. "I'm sure you made mistakes. No one is perfect, and no marriage is either, for that matter. But Theo is the one responsible for the failure of your marriage and he knows it."

Self-doubt was weighing on her. Memories of how one minute her marriage was perfect and then it was... over. It was over, and she didn't even realize it. How could she trust her own judgment when it came to wizards ever again?

Draco understood what Hermione was feeling. He went through the same self-doubt after the failure of his marriage, feeling like it was his fault he couldn't be everything Astoria needed. He knew he was being selfish and unreasonable to want more than Astoria could give. But after a few months of separation and distance from his marriage, he realized it wasn't his fault... any more than it was Astoria's. They ultimately just weren't compatible, and he refused to be in one of those arranged pureblood marriages that went through the motions to satisfy society, all while having a mistress on the side. He would not be his father. He suspected his mother had affairs as well, but he knew for a fact his father had had a long-term mistress. He had even met her once. Of course, he also knew his parents were fully aware of each other's dalliances, the Malfoy marriage vows prevented any form of betrayal. Ever since the war ended however, his parents had become close again and Draco was fairly certain the affairs were a thing of the past.

He shifted, "stand up, Pet." It was starting to rain harder. 'How about we go inside and I'll show you how I want you to kneel, among other things.' He looked at her, gauging her reaction. "Just a few things and then we'll spend the afternoon just hanging out or doing whatever you want to do."

She looked at him, contemplating. She couldn't deny her curiosity was peaked. She threw him a teasing smirk. "Fine, but I'm warning you, my ferret threat still stands."

He laughed. "Good to know, I'll take that under advisement."

She followed him down the steps to the living room. He pointed to the floor. "When you present yourself to me on our agreed upon times, you should be kneeling." He cocked an eyebrow and looked at the floor. She sighed and slid down to her knees gingerly.

He paced around her. "You can rest back on your heels, but your back should be arched, your knees should be shoulder width apart, your hands should be on your knees, palms up and your gaze should be down. This position should be comfortable, at least for a short amount of time. Remember, do not look at me or speak until you are given permission." He watched as she followed his instruction. 'Good girl.' He paced around her again. "This is also how you should present yourself to me should you ever have need of my Dominance outside of our scheduled times. This is called position one. If I command position one, or if I snap once, you should immediately fall to your knees and assume this position."

Hermione's eyes shot up to his. He was expecting it. He cocked an eyebrow. "Is there a problem?"

"Umm, no." She replied.

He walked back to the chair and sat facing her. "Good." After a short pause, he said, "Practice."

She hesitated, not sure she heard him correctly. He looked from her to the spot on the floor in front of his chair, expectantly. She took a deep breath and stood, walking over to him and gingerly going to her knees, assuming her kneeling position.

He smiled. "Again," he commanded. This time he looked at a different spot on the floor. Hermione shook her head with irritation, standing and stepping to the new spot and knelt, begrudgingly.

He stood up and walked in front of her. "Now for your inspection pose, which is position two, or 2 snaps" He snapped twice for effect.

She looked up at him, incredulously. "Inspection position?"

"Of course," he responded as though inspection poses were a normal part of everyday life. He continued pacing around her. 'So, this time you will stay up on your knees and will not rest back on your heels. Your back should be arched more dramatically than position one. Your shoulders back, your arse out, your gaze straight ahead and your hands clasped behind your head. Your elbows should be facing directly out sideways from your body. Your knees should be spread wide.' He continued his pacing, tapping her knee with his wand. "Wider." She spread her legs wider. "Perfect," he whispered as he reached down and stroked her cheek. "See how your breasts and beautiful bum are on display? You are magnificent, Pet... posing like this... even with clothes on."

He walked back over to the chair and sat. "Practice," he commanded

She rolled her eyes. "Why do I have to practice? This isn't exactly complicated, you know."

He cocked his eyebrow, once again, not saying anything, His silence spoke volumes more than words could have. She sighed heavily. "Fine," she huffed. She stood and walked over to him again, falling into position two.

"Again," he ordered.

She stood shooting him a scathing look. "You're pushing it Malfoy. I don't need to practice this." She stalked to where he pointed and dropped into position two.

Draco snapped once, his expression unchanged.

Hermione froze for a second, before it dawned on her he had actually snapped. She contemplated the best way to adjust her position and then did so, promptly.

He smirked. "It's important you know these positions and are comfortable with them. If you are doing a task or are distracted and I command 'position one' or snap once, you are expected to immediately and without hesitation fall to the floor, assuming the correct position. If you hesitate or pose incorrectly, you will be punished."

Hermione's jaw fell open. He leaned forward, lifting her chin, closing her mouth. "That is why you *practice*." He grinned.

He stood up, and offered her his hand, assisting her up. "So, have you had enough for now or shall I continue?"

"Oh, you're on a roll. Don't stop now. I can't wait to see what's next." Her sarcastic jibe earned her a hard smack on the bottom followed by a passionate kiss.

His piercing stare and words emphasized the truth of his unspoken promise. "Please, Pet. Do me a favor. Wag that smart mouth and roll those beautiful eyes when you're officially

submitting. You will make me a very... happy... wizard.”

He started to walk away. “Come,” he called back over his shoulder as he walked into the dining room. She followed him, hesitantly, but curious as to what could possibly be coming next.

“There will be occasions when you will serve me meals. I’m pleased you have a dining room, as I’m sure you remember, I do as well.” He looked at the newly purchased table and around the room. ‘You will serve me here.’ He pointed to the head of the table that was farthest from the kitchen. He looked behind the chair. “You will stand here, three feet behind and to the right, behind me.” He pointed to the correct spot.

Hermione was leaning against the wall. He looked at her expectantly. Exasperated, she sighed heavily and slowly walked over the spot he was pointing at.

He continued his instruction. “You will stand with your back arched, your arms crossed behind you, your feet shoulder width apart and your eyes straight ahead. You will not move your gaze unless I command it.”

He could tell she was getting irritated and it stroked a part of him long neglected. Deep inside him there was still a Slytherin that enjoyed goading the Gryffindor. He grinned as he walked closer to the table and turned back towards her. He knew all this was overwhelming for her, but he also suspected for all her huffing and puffing, she liked it. He had a teasing twinkle in his eye as he looked at her and said the word he knew would be her undoing. “Practice.”

He was not disappointed. Her response was immediate. She threw her hands in the air, stomped her foot and her face turned red as she wagged her finger at him. “NO! I will not practice *standing*... and just for your information Draco Malfoy, if you think I’m going to do *this* when you snap once and do *that* when you snap twice and do *who knows what* when you snap three times, well you’re going to be sorely disappointed.”

He smiled devilishly, watching her temper tantrum. “Oh, but I think you will, Pet.”

Her eyes were on fire with fury as she stared at him. He slowly pushed off from the table he’d been leaning against and stalked towards her. His tone was seductive, his eyes dark with lust. “You can deny it, but you and I both know you want this, Pet. You crave it, you need it.” He continued stalking towards the enraged lioness. Her reaction, stirring his own desire.

She looked away as he came closer. His look predatory, his words commanding. “So, enough of this misbehavior.” He gently grabbed her arm to lead her to the aforementioned spot. She pulled her arm away, forcefully, backing away from him, determined to defy him and have her way.

Instantly, Draco was on her. He grabbed her and pushed her back a few steps where she found herself pinned against the wall. His voice was low and feral, “Shall I force your compliance, Pet?” She struggled to get away from him. His left hand grabbed her waist and his right moved up to her neck, wrapping around it, not tight enough to in any way impact her breathing, but tight enough to drive home his point. His Dominance over her was now complete. He leaned in and playfully bit her jaw. “Oh, Pet. I like it when you struggle. By all means, don’t stop.” He breathed in deeply, his nose trailing down her neck. She shoved against his chest, but he was too strong.

Hermione's heart was absolutely racing, but not with fury, it was pure desire. She was quite certain this was the most turned on she had ever been. The way he had stalked towards her, and not allowed her to get away with her fit. It was exactly what she needed. The positions, the training and the snapping... she had become more and more mortified by it all as the morning had progressed. But not because she didn't want it. It was because she did. But it was too much. She had acted out because she refused to admit that she wanted it. And then he did exactly what she needed. He took control, he would demand her compliance, her choice taken away.

She could feel his erection pressing against her, his sweet breath on her skin. She continued struggling, his grip on her neck tightened, his weight pressing her harder against the wall. Her belly clenched, and her knickers were drenched, his show of unyielding force igniting a raging fire within her. She could feel his heart pounding in his chest as he pressed up against her. She stilled for a moment, waiting for her opportunity. She would not give in easily; this game was too much fun.

When she stopped struggling, he mistook it for surrender and released his hand from her neck, sliding it down to her right breast where he roughly rubbed her through her t-shirt. Taking him by surprise, she was able to wiggle out from between him and the wall, quickly stepping away, heat in her gaze as she looked back at him, daring him. He was fast. Three bounding steps and the viper had the cub. He grabbed her hair, close to the scalp, forcing her to the floor. He unsnapped and unzipped his jeans, freeing his hard cock. "Open your mouth," he commanded, his voice raw and full of need. He slapped his erection against her face as she clamped her mouth shut, denying him. He pulled her hair harder, her eyes shot up to his, her mouth falling open as she heaved in a breath at the sight of him; carnal, savage, dangerous.

Immediately, he seized his opportunity, shoving his cock into her mouth. She felt almost delirious with need for him and assaulted his steel rod with a barrage of licks and open-mouthed kisses down the sides, taking his balls into her mouth one after the other before tracing her tongue further down to his perineum where she licked and pressed, eliciting a hungry growl from the towering Dominant. His grip loosened, and he let out a raspy moan of pleasure. Suddenly, remembering she was supposed to be fighting him, she pulled back, refusing him, once again.

His chest heaved above her, and his words were raspy from her tease. "Fine," he mumbled. He reached down and grabbed her by the arms, pulling her up and forcing her towards the table where he bent her forward. His right hand pressed against her back, holding her down. His left hand forcefully pulling down her shorts and knickers. She tried to reach behind with her hands, continuing her display of false defiance. He was having none of it. He grabbed his wand and cast the restraining spell, her hands suddenly held in place on the table, over her head. Both of his hands now moved to her hips, easily sliding her shorts and panties down her thighs. She began to kick behind her. Once again, Draco grabbed his wand and cast the restraining charm, but this time, on her feet. He took a step back, drinking her in. "Finally, just how I like you, Pet. Restrained and at my mercy," he goaded.

Hermione was breathing heavily; her skin was flushed all over. He reached forward and rubbed her folds, finding her dripping wet. He fell to his knees and buried his face in her core, licking her folds and her hardened nub. His right hand began to rub it vigorously as he continued massaging her pussy lips with his lips and tongue until he got to her puckered hole,

where he nibbled and licked. Her response was instant. She yelped and squealed as her climax hit, her entire body shaking. He stood quickly and slid into her still quivering heated walls. “*Fuuuuuuck!*” He began to pump her mercilessly as he panted and grunted with each thrust. His balls tightened, and he practically saw stars as the most intense orgasm he ever had washed over him. He collapsed forward onto her back, lying there as his breathing and heart rate began to slow. After a minute, he slowly slid off her and stepped back, adjusting himself back into his jeans, which he had never removed.

He grabbed his wand, freeing first her feet and then her wrists. She didn’t move, she simply rested there, feeling like jello. He stepped towards her, wrapping his right arm under and around her waist, sliding her off the table and back against him. He slid to the floor and pulled her down on his lap. He tilted her face back and wiped the hair away that was stuck to her sweat tinged face. He kissed her forehead tenderly. “You ok?”

She slowly opened her heavily lidded eyes and smiled. “So much more than ok.”

He grinned, the Dominant within him sated and happy. “You liked that, huh?”

“That was... well, I don’t know *what* that was. But I loved it.”

He let out a breath. “When you resisted me and pulled away, I remembered you had given being forced a 4 with an asterisk on your limits list. I decided to go with it. I trusted you would safe word, if you truly wanted me to stop.” He then continued, playfully, “Or you would have grabbed your wand out of your pocket and turned me into a ferret.”

She laughed softly, snuggling into him. Then something dawned on her. She looked back up at him. “My arms,” she whispered. “You didn’t restrain my hands or my arms until the end. Was that why? So that I could stop you if I didn’t think to safe word?”

His look was contemplative. “Your safety will always be my paramount concern when we play. And, this was spontaneous. You weren’t officially submitting, and I wanted you to have an out. I need to be sure you will safeword if I ever push too hard or misread you. Please, promise me.”

She wiggled around, straddling him. “I promise, Draco.” She kissed him, gently. His hand moved to the back of her head, holding her as he deepened the kiss.

As his lips pulled back into a smile, she bit her lip, a playful twinkle in her eye. “So, what now? You going to tell me how to walk? 1 snap means I lead with my left foot, two snaps my right?”

He pinched his mouth closed, trying to contain his laugh. “Don’t temp me.” He shifted his weight. “Let’s take a shower, I think you’ve had enough training for one day.”

Chapter 20

Monday late afternoon...

Hermione leaned back in her chair, her mouth uncharacteristically gaping open in shock at what the heavily made-up, blonde witch sitting across from her had just divulged.

“Five female magical beings passed over in as many months? All with more experience than the males who were hired in their stead?” Hermione’s voice was incredulous.

Rita peeked over the rim of her jeweled, red spectacles, nodding that it was true.

“Have you spoken to these females?”

Rita removed the quill from her mouth, amazingly without red lipstick smeared all over it... *a charm perhaps?* Hermione pulled herself away from the insignificant observation, focusing on the discussion at hand. “I’ve flooded them and left messages. I’ve also reached out to Malfoy Enterprises.” She rolled her eyes. “Of course, there’s been no response. I’ve even reached out to the elusive Draco Malfoy himself, but he hasn’t returned my owls since I saw him last.” The flashy witch let out a sigh of frustration.

Staring at the now vacant wall behind her visitor’s chair, Hermione’s mind was reeling as she asked, “You said three goblins, a werewolf and a house elf?”

Rita nodded. “And, there was a quarter Veela who wasn’t even granted an interview. She had significant experience in France as a curse breaker. ME posted a position for a curse breaker in December. She applied before Christmas but was never even granted an interview. A human wizard was just hired a few weeks ago, so they waited a long time to fill the post.”

Hermione continued to ponder. “Rita, how did you obtain this information?”

The older witch paused, contemplating how to answer, a guilty look on her face.

Hermione rolled her eyes, “Oh, honestly Rita! How are we supposed to use evidence that’s been gathered illegally? You’re going to have to register as an animagus at some point!”

Rita shrugged. “How else am I supposed to get the dirt that’s not freely offered?”

“And you’re sure your information is correct?” Hermione asked, her eyes drawn to the journalist’s long, red nails.

Rita smirked, “I saw the employment files myself.” She then gloated, “I even have photographs.”

Hermione started to say something, her eagerness for copies evident, but Rita leaned back and dangled the juicy carrot. “For a price, Mrs. Nott... for a price.”

Hermione scowled. “I don’t think you want to go there, Rita.” Hermione’s tone matched her threatening words. She realized the implications of Rita’s evidence. Hermione needed it for her client and she would go after ME for all she was worth if what the evidence was

useful. However, she didn't like the idea of Rita going rogue on her. Hermione needed control of this evidence. This had to be handled delicately.

Rita Skeeter couldn't afford to betray Hermione, or she would end up in Azkaban, and they both knew it. Rita glared back, the staring contest a battle for control of the situation. Rita let out a huff. "Fine," she conceded with irritation.

Hermione merely nodded. "Leave the copies with Lizzy on your way out." Hermione watched Rita stand and gather her things. She knew she needed to give Rita at least something in order for the irritating journalist to continue their quid pro quo arrangement.

Hermione stood and proceeded cautiously, hoping she wouldn't regret this, yet realizing in all likelihood she would. "Rita, there's... there's going to be some news forthcoming about me." The garish witch suddenly looked up at her, her hawk like focus all anticipation. 'Let *me* direct the Malfoy Enterprises story... continue to bring me all the information you have and continue to uncover. Let me control how it's fed to the public.' She sighed heavily. "Let me do all this and in return, I'll give you an exclusive one on one interview." She rushed the following words and wagged her finger at the irritating gossip columnist turned journalist, "But if you twist that interview into a falsehood full of your subjective interpretations and your usual gossip trash, I **will** turn you into the Ministry. Do I make myself clear?"

Hermione could see the cogwheels turning as plainly as the stiff, hair-sprayed, non-moving curls on the side of the irritating woman's head. Rita's eyes lit up. "How good a story?"

Hermione sighed. "It will sell papers... and you'll have the exclusive. Do we have a deal?"

Rita drew herself up, tossing her bag over her shoulder. "Fine. Deal." With that, she turned and strutted out of the office.

Hermione sat back in her chair and opened the desk drawer, pulling out a vial of pain potion. Meetings with Rita always left her with a headache.

After Rita left, Lizzy walked into Hermione's office, handing her some owl posts that had just arrived. Hermione smiled at her in thanks and Lizzy offered one in return. "Ms. Skeeter left a file on my desk, would you like to see it now?"

Hermione shook her head. "No, it's getting late and I have plans. I'll look at it in the morning with fresh eyes."

Lizzy's voice was soft and slightly tremulous. "Hermione, I just want to thank you. I checked my Gringotts account today and discovered you had given me a substantial raise. I... I cannot thank you enough."

Hermione stood and walked around her desk, giving the older witch, who had become her friend, a hug. "Lizzy, you deserve it. You take such good care of this office and such good care of me."

After a few more words of appreciation, Lizzy exited Hermione's office. Hermione sat back down and started reading the posts Lizzy had just handed her. One of them caught her attention. An official looking, thick envelope with a magical seal that would confirm to the sender she had read it. It was the equivalent of muggle certified mail. She broke the seal with her wand as was required to read the contents.

“Holy mother of Merlin,” she whispered to herself. Hermione could barely breathe. Photo after photo after photo... there had to be more than twenty. All of her in a compromising position. Naked photos of her taken when she was dating and newly married to Theo. Pictures of her restrained, pictures of a hand spanking her, pictures of her mouth around his cock, but no pictures included an identifiable part of him or his face. There was an attached letter;

Dearest Hermione,

I begged my son not to marry you. Begged him is actually an understatement, but he would not listen to reason. Soo in love with you, he was. Now you defame his good name by filing for divorce and claiming him unworthy. I knew you for what you are, a mudblood little tramp. I knew it all along. I love my son, but he is weak... like his father before him. I knew one day these photos would be needed, so I commissioned them the minute my son admitted his love for you. Of course, I had no idea the photos would be so... revealing. Before these were taken, I knew you were filth, but these pictures proved how depraved you really are. You will fix this. You will make him happy and you will not tarnish the name of Nott with a divorce. There has never been a divorce in the Nott family history. You will not shame my son this way.

Ignore my demands and you will suffer the consequences. These pictures will spread like wildfire throughout the magical world. The famous Hermione Granger, nothing more than a filthy sexual deviant and tramp. Your sexual appetites are disturbing, abnormal. This is not a threat, Hermione. It's a promise.

Theo is not to know about any of this. Tell him and the photos go public. He is to believe you returned because of your undying love for him. For some reason he loves you and I would see him happy. Tell him and he will never forgive me. When that happens, I will reap my wrath upon your little head. Our family attorney has the originals for safe keeping with instructions for conditions of disclosure should anything happen to me.

DO NOT DOUBT ME!

Hermione felt her heart race as the room started to spin, she put her head between her knees and willed herself to take slow, deep breaths. After a few minutes, her heart rate slowed, and her breathing was more regular. She sat up, shakily stuffing the photos back into the envelope. She willed herself to calm down and be logical. *Think, Hermione! Think!*

She stood and started to pace. Ezmirelda Nott was a bitch, but she wasn't stupid. Surely, she realized these photos would tarnish her son as well. And Hermione could release this letter to the public, revealing the old, blackmailing bitch for what she was. And surely there were laws that would protect Hermione's privacy. Ezmirelda couldn't ruin Hermione without ruining herself and her son as well. But Hermione was smart enough to also realize the bitch would probably claim the photos were not of Theo, leaving the public to believe she cheated on him.

Strong as she was, Hermione could not bear the thought of the photos getting out. How would she face her friends? The Weasleys? Harry and Ginny? How would she walk down the street? She would lose her clients and her business would fail. *Draco! Draco will distance himself from you. He will leave you if these get out.* She knew this would be too much for him. The Malfoy's were all about public persona. Draco had worked very hard to repair the Malfoy's reputation and she knew he wouldn't sully it by being affiliated with her in any way

if these photos got out. She would also lose him if she went back to Theo. Her heart fell to the floor as it hit her. *You're going to lose Draco no matter what you do.*

Hermione looked at her watch, it was already 5:45. She was due at Draco's at 6:30. She grabbed her bag and tossed the envelope inside. *It's going to be ok, Hermione. You'll figure something out. You helped take down a dark lord, surely you can outsmart an old pureblood witch.*

She paused to look around her office, confirming she'd left nothing behind and left.

Forty-five minutes later she arrived via floo at Draco's flat. She had Apparated home and changed into jeans and a sweater. It would be a casual night of pasta, wine and relaxation, at least that was what Draco had proposed when he invited her.

She stepped into the living room to find Janky and Draco playing chess. Janky immediately jumped up upon her arrival and beamed up at her. "Welcome, Miss. May Janky take your robes and offer you a beverage?"

Hermione smiled at him, handing him her cloak.

"The shiraz, Janky, please," Draco instructed. The elf was gone with a pop. Draco stood, a soft and sexy grin on his face as he approached her. "I've missed you," he said quietly after giving her a gentle kiss on the lips.

He could immediately sense her tension. Something was wrong. "Everything ok?" He asked, as he took her hand and led her to the sofa.

She nodded, "uh huh, just been a busy Monday." Janky appeared with their glasses of wine and then disappeared promptly. Draco handed her glass to her. She took a large sip and sighed.

He watched her closely. Something was up, but he didn't want to push. Maybe she just needed to unwind. "Are you hungry? Janky makes a mean baked lasagna."

"Sure, sounds good." Draco could see her hand was shaking slightly as she brought her glass up to her mouth for another large swallow. He stood, once again taking her hand to lead her into the dining room. He paused as he watched her finish off her wine with three gulping swallows.

"Something happen, Hermione? You seem out of sorts."

"I'm fine, Draco. Let's eat." She responded, trying to sound normal and trying with all her might to forget about the envelope that was in her purse. She just wanted to have a nice evening with Draco and knew that if she didn't get herself together she would come apart in front of him.

"Hermione, you're shaking like a leaf. What is going on? Tell me!" He pleaded.

Unable to answer him, knowing that when she did it would all be over, she did the only thing she could think of. The only thing that would help her stop worrying, the only thing that would help her mind stop thinking about it.

She put her now empty glass on the table and slid to the floor at his feet, kneeling in position one.

Draco's jaw fell open as he stared down at her. After a few seconds, he stroked her hair.

"Look at me, Pet," he commanded softly.

Her eyes shot up to his, her brown orbs seeming dank and without their normal defiant spark. He had never seen her look so completely resigned and truly submissive. After meeting her gaze for a few seconds, he asked her, "Is this what you need? For me to take control?" She didn't answer, which only proved how far she had dived into her submissive persona. "You may speak, answer me."

"Yes, sir."

"Come, we will eat." When she started to stand, he touched her shoulder. "No, Pet. You will crawl."

He walked into the dining room as she crawled behind him. In truth, he hoped being told to crawl would bring some fire into her eyes. The Hermione of Saturday would have pitched a fit. But this wasn't defiant Granger, this was completely obedient and submissive Pet, and he felt like he was truly meeting this side of her for the first time.

"Janky, dinner please." The house elf popped in and placed their plates on the table and then promptly left with another pop. The elf seemed totally unfazed by the fact that Hermione was on all fours on the floor.

Draco sat in his chair and pointed to the floor, close to his chair on the right. "Kneel here. I will feed you."

Hermione kneeled quietly, her eyes down. She could hear the sound of cutlery on Draco's plate. His hand appeared in front of her mouth. "Open your mouth, Pet." He fed her bits of lasagna and bread by hand. He didn't speak, he just watched her as she maintained her complete submissive state while he continued to feed her. He found it incredibly arousing and yet incredibly disturbing at the same time. Something was obviously troubling her and he wasn't sure her shutting down like this was the best answer... but he wasn't sure it wasn't exactly what she needed either.

"Did you get enough to eat, Pet? Answer me."

"Yes, sir" He wiped his hands with his napkin before reaching down to clean her mouth.

He stood and walked back to the living room, impressed that she didn't follow. He had thought a punishment for not following commands might help. But she didn't fall for his trap. "Come to the living room, Pet. You may walk."

He watched as she gingerly got to her feet, her legs clearly stiff from having kneeled for so long. He sat on the end of the sofa, his legs crossed, his left arm draped along the back of it, his right elbow on the arm rest, with his forefinger rubbing his chin in contemplation. "Look at me." Her eyes moved to his. His gaze shifted down her form and back up. "Undress... to your knickers."

She didn't hesitate. Draco couldn't help the stir in his groin as he watched her undress so quickly, so efficiently and so submissively. She was hasty, but purposeful in her movements. She didn't just toss her clothes aside, she placed them neatly on the sofa next to him. He

uncrossed his legs and spread them slightly as he instructed, “Kneel between my legs, facing away from me. I wish to rub your shoulders.”

After she complied, he leaned over her as he softly rubbed her shoulders with his graceful, long fingers and strong hands. He leaned down, breathing in her scent before kissing her cheek. He whispered, a sultry tease to his tone. “Such a good little, Pet. Such a good little pussy.” He noticed a short and quick intake of breath from her. *Finally! A reaction!* While he was pleased she was submitting so perfectly, he wanted some fire from her. There would be times he would want her just like this, but tonight something was troubling her, and he needed to find out what it was. It seemed some dirty talk might make her more responsive. His hands continued massaging her shoulders and slowly moved down her chest until he was massaging her breasts. “Such lovely tits you have, Pet. I think I’ll fuck them tonight.” That earned him another short hitch of breath. He smiled.

He stood up and stepped in front of her still kneeling form. “Stand and follow me to the bedroom.” He walked away, heading towards his room and could hear her following behind. He walked to the side of the huge four poster bed, waving his wand to turn on the soft light from his bedside lamp.

“Slip off your panties and hand them to me.” Hermione slid out of the lacy blue thong and handed it to him. He found himself disappointed they were only slightly damp. This would not do. He raised the panties to his nose and inhaled deeply. “Bend over the side of the bed with your chest flat against the mattress.”

As soon as she was in position he leaned over and whispered in her ear. “Now, reach behind with your hands and spread your pussy nice and wide for me.” He smiled as he noticed the soft blush begin to creep over her neck and face. “I love it when you blush, Pet.” He kissed her softly on the shoulder.

He stepped back and stood behind her, placing his hands on her hips as he stared at what was displayed so beautifully before him. “You have such a pretty little cunt.” He began to rub her and was relieved to find she was wet. “The next time you spread yourself for my inspection, I will expect you to be clean shaved. I’ve enjoyed your neatly trimmed little curls, but I would like your pussy completely bare.”

He began to undress. “Pull yourself up on the bed and roll onto your back.” As soon as she complied, he climbed on her and straddled her chest. He stroked himself. “Push your tits together so that can fuck them.”

He moved his cock back and forth between her breasts as she held them in place. In truth, he really just wanted to sink into her and slowly make love. But she had requested his Dominance, and there was no denying he was enjoying this. Her face was still flushed, her hair was wild all around her, having come out of its clasp. Her eyes were closed. *This won’t do. I need to see you, Pet.* “Eyes on me,” he commanded. Beautiful, chocolate, lust-filled orbs met his. He leaned forward and kissed her passionately before sliding down her body, nibbling and gently biting.

It was time he got the answers he needed. He started with her breasts... massaging them, kissing them, stimulating her nipples into desperate, hardened peaks. Soft little moans told him she was slowly coming undone. He continued moving down until he was between her

legs, sucking and nibbling on her clit after licking her into a frenzied state. She began to writhe and moan, loudly. He stopped and looked up at her. "Stay still, or I'll spank you."

She let out a little whimper causing him to smile, devilishly. Focusing on her clit with one hand, he began to finger her with the other, curling his fingers into the spongy tissue that caused her to squirm so beautifully. He could tell she was getting close, so he pulled back and kissed her inner thigh. She let out another soft whimper. After a few seconds he went back to her clit and once again got her close to her release before pulling back.

"Pleeeeeease," she moaned full of need and pulled her thighs together, clearly looking for more friction. *Perfect!*

His tone was no longer soft. In his most Dominant and disciplinarian voice he scolded, "I believe I told you to be still and you spoke out of turn!" He stepped back and lifted his belt off the floor. 'I warned you I would spank you and now you've left me no choice.' He took a breath. "Up on all fours."

Unsure how far he should push her and unsure how much she could handle given the fragile state she was in less than an hour ago, he proceeded with caution. "I'll give you six warm up spankings with my hand. What's your safe word? Tell me!"

"Red," she whispered.

"Is this what you need, Pet? My Discipline, my control, my hand, my belt?"

"Yes, sir." Her voice was raw, like she needed to clear her throat.

As soon as she was in position, he slapped her right bum cheek. She let out a moan. He smiled as he slapped her left bum cheek, inspiring another needy mewl out of her perfect little mouth. He continued, not hitting the same spot twice. At the end of the six warm-ups, he ran his hand along her folds to find her sopping wet. He stood back and admired the soft pink blush of her gorgeous arse. He closed his eyes for a minute, refocusing on the task at hand.

"You will count, and you will answer my questions. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir," she whispered.

He switched his belt from his left hand to his right and brought the belt down on her in a sharp, stinging, slap.

"One," she yelled out. He reached forward and stroked her wet folds, counteracting the sharp sting of the belt with the soft, pressure of his fingers. Her nub was bullet hard.

He brought the belt down on her again, harder this time.

"Two," she whimpered before he flicked her clit, causing her to wiggle deliciously. "Hold still!"

He hated to do it, but he actually wanted her to cry, he wanted to bring her to the point of tears; be it through pleasure or pain or the combination of the two. He wanted her to let whatever was coiled up inside of her out.

He continued rubbing her and then leaned in and nibbled and flicked her again, this time with his tongue, eliciting a beautiful keening wail of need. "What upset you earlier?" He

demanded. She didn't answer.

He brought the belt down on her again, harder. "Three," she yelled out, her voice quivering and weak. He leaned in and buried his face in her once again, tonguing her clit maniacally, causing her entire body to quake with an impending orgasm. He quickly pulled away. "Pet, tell me. Tell me what had you so upset."

When she still wouldn't answer, he brought the belt down again. This time she let out a sob and a tear escaped as she yelled out the number four. He dropped the belt and once again buried his face in her as she continued to cry and pant, her core absolutely drenched, her need for release bringing her to the brink of insanity. "Tell me now, Pet. Tell me and I'll let you come."

She shook her head no as she quietly sobbed. He was at a loss but picked up the belt and brought it down on her one last time, the hardest he had ever hit her, but not harder than he thought she could take and not enough to harm her. He would never harm her. She began to bawl and as she collapsed onto her elbows, she could barely get the word out... "five."

He threw the belt to the floor and once again buried his face in her heat. He swirled his tongue and inserted one and then two fingers into her sloshy sleeve, pumping them in and out vigorously, as his mouth continued to assault her nub. Just when she was about to come, he pulled away. "Tell me!" He demanded.

That was it. Unable to take it anymore; choked, barely decipherable words spilled from her in gasps. "My... my purse." He could barely understand her but thought she said purse.

"What about your purse!"

"An... envelope." She sobbed louder than ever and fell flat onto the bed, unable to hold herself up any longer.

That was all he needed. He spread her legs, his mouth and hands easily bringing her off.

A course, animalistic, keening howl ripped out of her as her climax finally unleashed. Draco crawled up next to her and pulled her to him, wrapping her in his strong arms.

"Shh, shh, Pet. It's going to be alright." He whispered as he continued holding her, her cries diminishing slowly. He kissed her temple and gently stroked her cheek. "I'm going to run you a bath. I'll be right back."

Hermione felt the bed dip as he slipped away from her. That had been the most intense sexual experience of her life. Not necessarily the most intense orgasm, but definitely the most emotional. She wiped her face and while she was upset and exhausted, she did feel better. She felt like she had run a marathon. He had been relentless. Magnificent really. Of course, it would all be over soon. Draco would see the letter and photos and then he would end it with her.

She felt strong arms wrap under her knees and shoulders, lifting her out of bed and carrying her to the bath. He gently lowered her into the steaming water. She let out a little squeal as the hot water hit her tender bottom.

Draco placed his hand under her chin and turned her face towards him as he kneeled by the tub. He spoke softly, but firmly. "I know your bottom is tender, but I will not be using any

calming balms or healing charms. You will deal with it until it heals on its own. Your sore bottom will remind you that you belong to me. You will learn to confide in me, without being tortured to the edge of sanity to do so.” He was rubbing the flannel over her skin, tenderly. He looked from the cloth up to her eyes. They were soft and warm and full of affection. Relief coursed through him, his girl was back.

He leaned in and kissed her. When he started to pull away, she reached out to him, stroking his face, studying him like she was trying to memorize him. He pressed his cheek into her hand. She smiled softly at him. She leaned over the edge of the tub and brushed her lips against his. He wrapped his hand around the back of her head, deepening the kiss. She pulled back. “Draco, will you make love to me?” She wanted one last tender encounter with him before he read that letter and her world came tumbling down around her.

Chapter 21

Hermione's right leg and arm were sprawled over Draco, her head on his chest. His right arm was draped around her, holding her to him. His thumb softly rubbing her hip. She knew he was eager to find out what had her so upset, but she hoped he would lay with her a little longer. Who knew when, or even if, he would ever hold her like this again.

"You ok?" He whispered as he looked down at her, a small smile on his face.

She smiled back at him, softly. "Yes, that was lovely, thank you. Thank you for taking care of me."

He stroked her cheek. "Always. Now what had you so upset earlier? Are you going to tell me or do I need to get your purse?"

She swallowed as she ran her hands through the small thatch of hair on his torso. She wouldn't look at him. "I think you're going to just have to see for yourself."

When he started to shift her off him, she held him tighter. "Not yet, please!"

"Hey," he whispered reassuringly. "What could possibly have you so undone? This isn't like you!"

"Just, lay here with me... just a little longer." She looked up at him with troubled, pleading eyes.

He watched her, worry lines across his forehead. He continued stroking her cheek and softly rubbed her head. Hermione loved how tender Draco was after intimacy. Even when they were having a D/s scene he would always take care of her afterwards. She would miss him terribly if it ended.

"I'm... I'll be right back. I can't wait any longer, I have to see what has you tied up in knots!" He slid out from under her and pulled on a pair of pajama bottoms before leaving the bedroom.

Interesting choice of words. Hermione pulled herself up and leaned against the headboard. Draco was carrying her purse when he walked back into the bedroom only seconds later.

She looked up at him and met his questioning gaze. "It's ok. It's an envelope. You can't miss it."

Draco opened her bag and pulled the envelope out, setting her bag on the chair at the foot of his bed. He opened it and pulled out the contents, his jaw falling open and his eyes wide with shock as he flipped through the photos. "Who? When?" He asked without looking at her as he flipped through them.

"Theo... Taken right before and right after we married. Read the letter."

Draco sank on to the bed, sitting on the edge as he read. After he finished, he didn't say anything. He slipped the photos and the letter back into the envelope and walked over to the

chair where he gently placed the envelope back into her bag.

Hermione couldn't take his silence. "Say something," she whispered.

Draco didn't look at her and he didn't say anything. He stared at the floor, one hand on his hip, the other rubbing his eyes and his face. His voice was calm, but Hermione could tell he was fighting to stay in control. "Clearly, these photos can't get out," he said, still not looking at her.

"Clearly," she responded, her voice barely above a whisper. She closed her eyes, preparing herself for the words she knew he would say.

She nearly jumped out of her skin at the loud shattering crash. She looked up, Draco's face beat red with fury, still not looking at her. The vase that had been on the mantle, now destroyed into glass shards. There was a hole in the wall where it had impacted.

"Fuuuuck!" He bellowed as he started to pace.

Hermione watched him, unsure if he would turn his anger towards her for having let herself be photographed in such a way. Of course, she hadn't known she was being photographed, but still. She blamed herself, she couldn't fault him for blaming her as well. Clearly, she had not been observant enough of her surroundings. Obviously, her wards had not been sufficient. Some of the photos had been taken at Theo's, but most had been at her old place.

Hermione began to slide out of bed and Draco's eyes shifted to her movement. "Where are you going?" he asked, his voice and expression tense, angry.

Hermione paused, looking at him. She needed to leave. Clearly, he was angry and wanted her gone.

When she didn't answer, some of the rage began to leave his face. "I just need to think for a minute, Granger."

Hermione continued to slide off the bed until she was sitting on the edge. "I'll talk to Theo. I'll show it to him. Maybe he'll be able to help."

Draco laughed without humor, shaking his head. "This is going to make Theo a very happy man."

Hermione shook her head at him. "Theo cares about me, he wouldn't want his mother to release these photos. Maybe... maybe he'll be able to help."

Draco looked at her disbelievingly. "Hermione, please don't tell me that after being with the wizard for over eight years you still don't know him." When she just stared at him, not responding, he replied in a tone quite condescending. "He's a Slytherin, Granger. He will try to manipulate this to his advantage."

Hermione shook her head. "What choice do I have, Draco? I have to go back to him! I either have to do as the letter says or I have to appeal to him to help me. He's a good man. Despite everything, I have to believe that! I have to believe he'll help me. He can... I don't know... he can tell his mother he doesn't love me anymore, talk her into letting him divorce me. Maybe if the divorce were initiated by him she would stomach it better."

He shook his head, disdain in his voice, once again. “You still believe that everyone is noble and good. Despite what you’ve seen in this world... you’re naive, Granger. Theo will use this to manipulate you back into his life.”

“No, I... I’m not naïve... but, I... I think I know my husband.”

“You sure about that? He cheated on you for years. You didn’t have a clue! Now you just want to put your faith in him?”

Hermione stared at him, her arms crossed, her anger building. Anger at him for saying the words, anger at herself for the words being true.

Draco stared at the floor. After a minute he asked, calmly. “I wonder when she expects you to do this.”

Hermione swallowed. “It arrived, charmed with a confirmation read seal this afternoon.”

He shook his head. “Well then, she knows you’ve read it. She’ll expect you to act soon. Have you considered talking to her?”

“And say what?” Hermione asked as her anger and frustration continued to build. ‘She doesn’t want a divorce tarnishing the family! She overly dotes on Theo. She always has. He does nothing wrong in her eyes — except fall in love with *me*. Second to the family name, she cares about his happiness more than anything else.’ She stared at the broken vase. “I wish I had leverage over her. Maybe... maybe if I can get my hands on those journals? She wouldn’t want those to get out.”

Draco turned to her, eyes alight with agreement. “Yes, that’s a good idea.” He stared at her, thinking. “Would it be obvious to an outsider that it’s him? Is his name mentioned outright in the entries?”

Hermione swallowed. “I... I don’t know for sure. I only read a few entries from one of the four journals.” She chewed her lip. ‘I need to get my hands on them.’ She shook her head, resignation in her voice. “I have to go back to him. I have to ask him to help and if he says no, I’ll have to find those journals. Maybe there are other... I don’t know... love letters or photos of them together. I need to go through the spare bedroom office and see what I can find.”

Draco sighed. “I can’t believe this is happening.” He turned to her. “I just got you... I don’t want to lose you.” He took her hand and held it. After a minute, he pulled her to him. He held her tight, kissing her hair.

She swallowed. “Draco, if those photos get leaked, my reputation will be ruined. I won’t blame you... you know, if you don’t want me anymore.”

His eyes shot down to hers. “I’ve told you... countless times, Hermione. I want you. This doesn’t change that. It just... it just means we would have to keep our relationship a secret, that’s all.”

She bit her lip, understanding why he said it, but slightly heartbroken all the same. There was a piece of her that had wanted him to tell her to forget about the pictures. To let Ezmirelda spread them. That he didn’t care and that she shouldn’t either. To screw the wizarding community. She wanted him to say that no matter what, he would stand by her and be there for her. She would ignore him, of course, and do whatever she had to do to keep

Ezmirelda from spreading them. It would have been nice if he had said the words, all the same. She knew it was an unreasonable desire, though, and she didn't fault him.

She pushed away from him. "I need to leave. I need to talk to him."

He nodded and waved his wand, her clothes floating from the other room onto the bed. He watched her dress. "We'll figure something out, Hermione. Don't do anything rash. Don't make any promises you aren't sure about." He paused. "We'll try it your way. Even though I know he won't help you without getting something in return."

Hermione walked past him, picking up her bag. "Well, let's hope it's something I can live with. At least until I figure out how to deal with his vile mother."

"When will I hear from you? I'm going to lose my mind tonight... you know that, right?"

Hermione smiled up at him. "No matter what, Draco. You're the one I want. I'm fighting for myself, but I'm also fighting for us. I'll contact you as soon as I can. I just don't know when that will be and what the circumstances are. If we're lucky, you'll see me later tonight."

"You're so naive, Angel." He stepped towards her, pulling her close. "Don't leave me hanging."

"I won't," she smiled up at him. She surprised herself when the words came out her mouth. "I've fallen in love with you, Draco Malfoy."

His eyes grew wide. He swallowed and kissed her passionately.

Hermione apparated home to shower. She changed into the baggy jeans and red sweater that Theo hated. She took her hair down and mussed it a bit, making it look messy. She didn't want to look attractive, desirable. She brushed her teeth and looked at her reflection. *He'll help you. He has to!*

Five minutes later Hermione found herself standing at the door to the apartment, the apartment which had been her home for seven years. She took a deep breath and drew her shoulders up, reaching up to knock.

When the door opened, Hermione froze. Ezmirelda Nott stood before her. The horrid woman's five-foot-ten-inch frame towering; a scowl and a sneer of triumph on her face.

Hermione didn't say anything, the scorching look of hatred she shot at the older woman told it all.

"Theo, darling!" The wretched woman crooned. "Look who's come to visit."

Theo stepped up behind his mother, his hands holding a dish towel. His jaw dropped open in shock at seeing her. "Hermione!" The smile and joy that came over his face at seeing her thawed her anger, she had to remember he was not part of this blackmail. He stepped past his mother, gesturing her inside. "Come in, come in."

Ezmirelda stepped back, a fake smile plastered across her overly made-up face. Ezmirelda was tall and thin. Her dyed blonde hair cut into a sharp bob. She was dressed in a striking, designer muggle silk pant suit. Designer muggle heels to match. As if reading the young witch's mind, the old bat explained. "Please excuse my unconventional attire. I've just come

from my monthly Muggle-born outreach meeting. I find that dressing in muggle clothes makes the muggle parents more comfortable.”

Hermione rolled her eyes internally at the gall of the witch. The woman hated Muggle-borns, yet she was a co-chair of the MOS, otherwise known as the Muggle-born Outreach Society. It was a committee of snooty, pureblood witches who met with Muggle-born parents and Muggle-borns. Supposedly with the intention of making the transition to the wizarding world easier. It was all a farce and a front to disguise the utter contempt and hatred most of the witches on the committee felt toward Muggle-borns. Narcissa Malfoy was also a member and Hermione had no doubt she was every bit as two-faced as the bitch standing before her.

Hermione didn’t respond and simply stared at the woman, an equally fake smile plastered on her face. Ezmirelda looked away from Hermione, kissing her son on his cheek. “I must run darling. It’s getting late. Let’s have lunch this week.”

“Uh, sure Mom.” He responded absently, his eyes still on Hermione.

Ezmirelda grabbed her robes and bag and shot Hermione a look of warning and hatred as she left; the sickening sweet smell of her perfume lingering behind her.

Theo shook his head. “Hermione what are you doing here? Did you come to get the rest of your stuff?” His voice was kind, hopeful.

“Actually, I need to talk to you, Theo.”

The wizard swallowed, unable to conceal the hope in his eyes. “Of course, Hermione. Whatever you want. I’m just thrilled to see you!”

Hermione nodded and walked into the living room, sitting on the chair by the fireplace.

“Can I get you anything? Tea? A glass of wine?”

She looked up at him and shook her head. “No. No, thanks.”

Theo’s face fell as he noticed the worry that was etched across her face. He knew his wife, he knew her well, and something was really bothering her. “Hermione, what is it? Are you ok?” He sat on the end of the sofa, closest to her chair.

She shook her head, her voice shaky. “No, Theo. I’m not.”

Theo’s heart started to race. Was she coming back? Was she here to confess her unhappiness and how unhappy she was without him? He didn’t dare to hope. “Tell me, Kitten. What is it?”

She swallowed, fighting the emotion that was beginning to swell within her.

“Theo, you would never hurt me, right? I mean — intentionally?”

Theo shook his head slowly. “I would never do anything to hurt you. The fact that I did is tearing me up inside. I love you, Kitten. You’re still my world, you know that.” He reached forward and took her hand. “I’ll never do anything to hurt you again. If you give me another chance, you won’t regret it. I promise!”

Hermione looked at him sadly. “I’m not here to ask you back, Theo. I’m here because I need your help so that I can move on with my life.”

The disappointment and hurt on Theo's face was jarring and Hermione felt guilty for not having approached him differently. Coming to him like a wounded bird might not have been the best option, however, letting him be the knight in shining armor who comes to her rescue might be just what he needs.

"I'm being blackmailed, Theo. Blackmailed to take you back."

The look of confusion on his face was genuine. Hermione had no doubt he knew nothing of his mother's scheming. "What?" he asked, voice barely above a whisper. The shock of her words stunning him.

She reached into her purse and pulled out the envelope. She handed it to him, her whole arm trembling. Theo took the envelope, his eyes not leaving her face.

He opened it and pulled out the photos. His eyes just about popped out of his head. "What the...?" He flipped through them quickly and swallowed. "Don't tell me Daphne has..."

Hermione interrupted him. "Not Daphne, Theo. Your vile mother. Read the letter."

Theo's eyes shot up to hers, disbelief on his face. "My mother? What?"

"Just read it." Hermione stood up and began to pace. It had come down to this moment, she would know shortly whether Draco had the right of it or if she did.

"Wow," he whispered, more to himself than anything. "She, she didn't want me to marry you, it's true. I... I never told you that."

Hermione smirked, "Theo, I've always known your mother hated me. I just always thought it was because of your father... you know... being a Death Eater and all."

He was quiet as he flipped through the photos once again.

"Theo, help me. Help me make this go away. She's your mother, you can tell her to not do this."

He leaned back on the sofa, watching her... thinking. Hermione began to feel uneasy as his expression began to change from one of an injured and adoring puppy to a touch of the self-assured confidence he displayed when they were dating. She swallowed.

His words were slow, his eyes studying her. "Hm, of course, Kitten. Of course, I'll help you. The question is, what is the best way to help you?" Hermione didn't notice the renewed twinkle in his eyes or the slight upturn of his mouth.

Hermione let out a breath of relief. "Thank you, Theo! I knew you wouldn't let me down. I knew you'd help."

He stood up and slowly stalked towards her. "You did the right thing coming to me." He pulled her into his arms and gave her a hug, breathing her in.

Alarm bells began going off in Hermione's head.

"I know how to help you, Kitten. I know what you need, and I'll take care of everything."

Hermione froze as his hand rubbed up and down her back; his presence and voice morphing more and more into the wizard of her past. She swallowed and pushed back from

him gently, not wanting to anger or offend him. She slowly moved her gaze up to his face, already knowing what she would see.

She swallowed heavily as she stared into the face of a man she hadn't seen in five years. Controlling, confident, a force — Dominant Theo was back.

INTERMISSION — *The orchestra starts to play. Now would be a good time to use the restroom, refill your teacup. Maybe grab some popcorn. Our story will resume in 10 minutes ;)*

Hermione stepped back from him. Shaking her head. "What are you doing, Theo?"

A mischievous smile crept over his face as his eyes moved from her eyes to her lips and back. "Taking care of you." He said simply, softly.

"No, this isn't taking care of me. This is you manipulating the situation!" She crossed her arms and stared up him, fury building. *Damn that ferret for being right!*

Theo shrugged, his cocky smile still present. "Call it what you want, Kitten, but I know how to make you happy. I know how to make this marriage work. I'll fight for you, and if this is what it takes, I won't hesitate."

"Theo, no matter what, I'll never come back to you. I came to you tonight because I thought I could trust you and thought you'd help me."

"I *am* helping you, Kitten." He stepped away from her and sat on the sofa, his eyes raking up and down her form. 'You'll move back in. We'll slowly rebuild. We'll be better than we were before.' He sighed, his voice less confident, his tone more pleading. "I'll... I'll do whatever it takes to make you happy, Hermione." Dominant Theo was gone. Every day, sweet Theo was back. Hermione internally rolled her eyes.

Her words were adamant. "I'm with Draco, now. It's over Theo. I've moved on."

The look of rage on Theo's face took Hermione aback, instantly regretting her words.

His voice was cold. "Well, you won't see him again. That's over. Get it in your head. I won't allow it!"

Hermione was blinded with fury. "You won't *allow* it? Are you bloody kidding me? Please tell me you're joking and you don't honestly think I'll let you control who I see or what I do!"

Theo picked up the envelope and played with it in his fingers. "I wonder what the first headline of the Daily Prophet will be after these are released?"

Hermione's stomach dropped. "Theo, please... see *reason*. You cheated on me! You abandoned our marriage five years ago! I've found some happiness. I will not let you take it away from me!"

She watched as he closed his eyes, when he opened them his face was anguished. Hermione could see his internal battle displayed plainly on his face. He was torn between doing what was right and what he wanted. Hermione watched with trepidation as his look morphed back into the confident wizard from a moment ago. Determination clear on his features, he looked up at her. "You'll be here every night. You'll give me a chance to make things right. You'll come back to our bed. We'll exist as husband and wife." He sighed

heavily. "I'll let you... you can do what you want during the day. Run your business, fuck Draco, do whatever you need, but you will not stop being my wife. In time, you'll see I'm right. In time, you'll thank me. It won't be long until you give him up... or he gives up on you. Either way, eventually... you'll fall in love with me again."

Hermione stared at him, realizing how desperate he really was. She couldn't believe he just said she could fuck Draco. Clearly, he was grasping, searching for the words that would make her give in, as if the blackmail wasn't already enough.

He stood and walked towards her. All she could do was stare at him, shaking her head in disbelief. "Theo... who are you? Do you know me at all? I will *never* love you again! You'll only force me to despise and hate you if you take advantage of me this way. I came to you with this because I *trusted* you!"

His look was soft, and he sighed with resignation. "Yes, it's unfortunate you feel that way. However, in time... in time you'll come to see I was right." He took her hand. 'Don't you see, Kitten? I love you enough to do this. I love you enough to fight for you.' He paused. "My mother was wrong, and I'll deal with her... don't you worry." He looked around the room. "We'll have to have the apartment checked for cameras and bugging charms as well." He looked back at her. "I know she was wrong, but that doesn't mean what she did won't ultimately help us. We'll both be thanking her in time."

Hermione pushed back from him, a look of disgust and shock in her face. "You're mad, Theo! Certifiable."

He shrugged. "Maybe, but it's because I love you so very much." He stepped back and waved his wand, locking the door. "Come along, Kitten. It's time for bed."

Tuesday Morning

Hermione arrived to work at 6:30 am. She had never been so eager to get to her office. She had already sent an owl to Draco before Theo had woken. Thank Merlin, Theo was a heavy sleeper.

She had just slipped her purse into the bottom drawer of her desk, when the blond wizard walked into her office. He stood in the doorway staring at her. Hermione watched him, neither of them speaking. Her look said it all.

"That bastard," he whispered.

Hermione sat at her desk, grabbing a vial of pain potion from her desk drawer. She swallowed the bitter elixir and tossed the bottle into the trash.

"Did he touch you?" Draco voice was raw, his hands in fists at his side. Hermione wouldn't look at him. No longer calm, he yelled. "Dammit, Hermione. Did he touch you?"

She shook her head, tears welling. "No... no. He tried to... he almost... but, no."

Draco closed his eyes, inhaling deeply. He walked to her desk, staring down at her. "Are you going to tell me what happened?"

She couldn't look at him. "He... he... You were right. He's not going to let me go."

Hermione stood and stared out the window as she recounted to him everything that had been said. He glared at her back as she talked. When she was finished he collapsed in the chair in front of her desk. His head in his hands. "Fuck," he whispered.

He leaned back in the chair and looked at her. She was no longer facing the window, choosing to lean against the sill facing him, instead.

Rage, desire, need... it all came over him at once. He stood and stalked over to her, grabbing her roughly by her elbows and kissing her hard. Hermione moaned with need as clothes were being ripped, pulled, and tossed aside. Draco grabbed a handful of hair at the back of her neck and forced her to bend over the desk. Her cheek was pushed roughly to the glossy surface as his other large hand grasped both of her wrists to immobilize them at the small of her back as he slammed into her. "You're mine, damnit." He fucked her with abandon, his primal need to dominate her, to take control of her, overcoming him. He came with a growl, her wrists still held in his left hand as his right hand pulled her hair, forcing her head back and her back to arch. His mouth was on her neck chewing, sucking, nibbling, biting. He collapsed onto her back, releasing her hands and her hair as reason and sanity came back. He swallowed as he pulled away from her.

Hermione stood on shaky legs, her hands splayed on the desk to help steady her. Draco grabbed her and held her, pulling her body into his to steady her. "I'm... I'm sorry. I..."

She turned back to him. Her soft eyes understanding, looking up at him. Sadness came over her. "This is how it's going to be, isn't it?" She paused. "A pissing contest between you both. Me sneaking off with you during the day, having to hide how I feel about you; him trying to make me look at him the way I used to and getting angry at me when I don't. Eventually he'll... he'll force me." She swallowed the lump in her throat.

Draco's tone was deadly. "If he lays a hand on you, I'll kill him."

Hermione stepped away from him. "He's my husband, Draco. He's not going to let me leave. He's not going to help me... I have to help myself. I have to... I have to either find a way to stop this, or I have to leave him. No matter the consequences."

Draco shook his head. "You'll be ruined, Hermione. I won't be able to marry you. I won't be able to..." He trailed off, eyes wide at his bold declaration.

Hermione looked up at him with shock. "Marry me? You've never mentioned marriage, Draco!"

He turned away, embarrassed for saying too much, too soon. "Well, it'll be moot if those photos are released."

She turned away from him. "Obviously I don't want them released either!"

He rubbed his eyes. "Look, I have a breakfast meeting. I have to go. Can we talk this afternoon?"

Hermione contemplated. "I've got a meeting at the Ministry this afternoon. Can you come here tomorrow? Same time?"

Draco nodded. He walked over to her, softly kissing her and twirling one of her stray curls in his fingers. "We'll figure this out... just... don't let him touch you." His eyes were intense,

stormy grey. “I mean it. Do whatever you have to do to keep him away from you.”

Chapter 22

Tuesday continued...

After Draco left Hermione's office, she hastily got to work on Moxie's case. Her personal life might be in shambles, but she would do all she could to keep her professional one in check. After grabbing the file Rita had left the day before, she fixed a cup of tea and headed back to her desk.

She opened the file and, after reversing the shrinking charm, her desk was piled high with folders. She flipped through the documents and organized them as she went. She was begrudgingly impressed with Rita's thoroughness. At Hermione's fingertips was all the information she would need. Every job posting, application, and hire from the past two years was in front of her. She also had all the interview notes for each candidate who was granted an interview, this also included the peer review information Draco had eluded to. There were seventy-seven positions that had been filled over the past two years and over 850 applications for those positions. It would take a lot of time to sort through it all and she would need Lizzy's help.

Before Hermione knew it, it was almost one o'clock in the afternoon. She was going to be late for her monthly Ministry appointment. Thank goodness she checked her reflection in the mirror before she left. She found small, but obvious, love bites scattered on her neck. She cast a glamor, internally scolding Draco for his adolescent marking proclivities. She was sure he had done it on purpose.

The first Monday of each month, she met with Nelba Bittington. Nelba was the director of the Magical Being Protection and Oversight department at the Ministry. She was an avid supporter and defender of rights for the magical beings in which Hermione took such an interest.

Hermione filled Nelba in on her client and the research she was gathering. The ministry worker was excited and promised to help Hermione prepare when it came time to go before the review board. Hermione would need to procure the review board's endorsement, or she would never be able to propose her new legislation before the Wizengemot.

She left her meeting wanting to go anywhere but home and wishing she could see Draco. *I need a drink.* A decision made, she apparated to The Wayward Broom; she just couldn't bear to go back to Theo's. That flat would never feel like home to her again. When she stepped inside the bar, she was pleased to find it empty. It was too early for happy hour and too late for the lunch crowd. She slid into a bar stool, setting her bag on the empty stool next to her.

"Fire whisky," she requested. The bartender nodded and began preparing her drink. Even though she didn't want to think about it, her thoughts were consistently pulled to the awful situation she found herself in. As soon as the drink was placed in front of her, she swallowed it down in one big gulp. As the burn made its way down her throat, she remembered the night before. She had managed to keep Theo from touching her and was not looking forward to fighting off his advances again. She laughed internally. *What a difference two weeks makes.*

Old Ogden's was working its magic, it calmed her and with that came the ability to think more clearly. A plan formed in her mind. She would have to manipulate Theo. Make him believe she would try. She would play along with his delusion just enough to keep him calm and unsuspecting. When alone in the apartment or when he slept, she would dig around for evidence of his affair, or anything unsavory she could find about him, or even better, his mother.

After a second shot of Fire Whisky, she Apparated to her apartment to grab some clothes and feed Beauty. The cat purred as Hermione stroked her. "Beauty, if I don't have this sorted within the next few days, I'll bring you to Theo's."

After grabbing what she needed, she begrudgingly Apparated to her old home. Upon opening the front door, she was stunned and irritated at the same time. Theo was home early and was preparing, what appeared to be, a romantic dinner. There were roses on the table, which was set with their finest plates, a bottle of champagne on ice, and already lit candles.

Upon hearing her, he stepped into the living room, smiling. "Hi, Kitten. Dinner will be ready in twenty minutes." The fake smile on her face felt incredibly awkward and she hoped he didn't notice. She dashed into the bathroom and shut the door, just needing a moment to herself, to get her head in the game. She wasn't expecting him to try to romance her, not after his caveman behavior the night before.

When she walked back out, she entered the kitchen. "Since when do you cook?" She tried to sound calm and mildly interested, of which she was neither.

He shrugged. "I'm learning. Hope these steaks come out well."

He turned away from the stove and watched her for a moment, the silence awkward. "Look, Kitten. I've been thinking all day about everything. I handled last night..." He trailed off, looking up at the ceiling like he was trying to find the right words. "...poorly and I'm sorry." His blue eyes were on hers, the desperation in them made her heart constrict. 'Just give me a chance, ok?' When she didn't say anything he continued, his plea heartfelt, his demeanor vulnerable. "If you could just... have a little patience with me, you'll see how good it can be." He smiled, nodding at her, willing her to understand and to remember. "You've forgotten how good it used to be, and that's completely my fault! I'm the one who fucked up everything. Please understand, I'm not trying to take advantage of you Kitten, I'm just trying to... I'm trying to do what I can to make it right between us again." He seemed so helpless, like he was putting himself on the line for her. It irritated her that he wasn't actually the defenseless one. There was no justice in her situation.

Suppressing her desire to lash out, she swallowed her tongue. Entreating him to understand, she said calmly, "but Theo, you are *blackmailing* me... just like your Mother. I'm here because you are *forcing* me to be here."

A wounded look came over his face, his voice defeated. "Please don't see it that way."

Her expression remained unchanged. Her arms were crossed under her breasts, her eyes on the wall over his head, refusing to look at him. She knew resentment poured off of her in droves, and she didn't care. He stepped over to her and took her right hand in both of his. "I'll make a deal with you." She made a disbelieving tutting sound in the back of her throat, not

bothering to hide her disgust of that phrase. *A deal. Phht. I'll give you a deal right in your face.*

"If after six months you still want to leave, I won't stop you. I'll talk to my mother and convince her to destroy the photos. Just give me — *us* — six months."

Hermione looked at him, processing his words. A lightness filled her for a moment, almost like there was hope. Then it dwindled a bit — *six months?! Merlin*, she didn't know if she could make it that long.

Theo, on the other hand, knew this would work. He knew that she would agree to at least try, but he needed her full participation. It was time to go in for the kill. "All I ask is for you to *try*, Hermione. You have to give me a fair chance. We can go to counseling if you want but do as I said last night; be here every evening, sleep next to me, eat meals with me... coexist with me." He closed his eyes and sighed, the next words coming out as though they were painful. 'You don't have to... be intimate with me. I won't force myself on you.' He turned away and stepped back towards the oven, checking the steaks. "But you can't be intimate with him either."

Hermione was so stunned, she froze on the spot. It wasn't good enough. Not by a long shot. However, it was so much better than what he had demanded the night before. Six months wasn't forever. She stared at his back, her mind whirling.

When she didn't respond, he continued, still not looking at her. "I don't want you being with him in that way. I was foolish last night to say you could, I wasn't thinking clearly. I can't stomach it."

Sticking to her plan of fake compliance, she replied to him quietly, resignation in her voice. "Ok, Theo. I don't see where I have much choice. I'll try to do what you've asked." It was a bitter pill to swallow and she tried her best to disguise the disgust she felt towards him; disgust for manipulating her in such a way.

He turned back towards her, a genuine smile on his face. "Really?" He rushed towards her, pulling her into an awkward hug. She left her arms down at her sides, not returning the embrace. "It's going to be ok, Hermione. You'll see I'm right. I'll treat you well. I'll be the husband I wanted to be all along; the husband you deserved." In his excitement, his words came out rushed, but not lacking conviction. Feeling she had no choice, she tentatively patted him on the back as he held her.

When they sat down to eat, Theo poured them each a glass of champagne. "To new beginnings," he toasted, a big smile on his face. She gave him a reluctant smile and touched her glass to his, wishing she were anywhere other than sitting across from him.

Wednesday Morning

Hermione woke up at five in the morning. While in the shower she reflected on the night before. Theo had cleaned the kitchen and had read after dinner, foregoing television. She had to admit it was refreshing change from their old life style. During dinner, he had discussed the library and inquired about what she was currently reading. He had mentioned new releases the library had obtained and informed her the newest edition of *Hogwarts: A History* was being released in a month's time. In short, he was trying very hard. He had been kind to her

and true to his word, he had not so much as touched her outside of the hug he had given her in the kitchen.

After dressing and confirming he was still asleep, she crept into the office, hoping and praying she would find something useful. Her face fell as she looked around. It had been completely cleaned. The book shelves were freshly organized, and she was surprised to see them looking decidedly barren. She scanned them urgently, the journals were nowhere in sight. She opened the desk drawers to find they were free of clutter and neatly organized. In a bottom right drawer, all the birthday and anniversary cards Hermione had ever given Theo were tucked in a box. *Well, that would be almost sweet if he hadn't shared more than half of those birthdays and anniversaries with his mistress, too.* She sighed as she shut the drawer and continued looking around the room.

She almost jumped out of her skin when he spoke. His voice was soft and calm as he leaned against the door frame, watching her with knowing eyes. "I cleaned it out after you left. I got rid of everything having to do with her. It's all been destroyed." He stepped into the room and approached the bookshelves, pulling down one of the texts. He flipped through it absently before putting it back on the shelf. 'She's out of my life and I feel clean.' He took a deep breath as he looked around. "It felt great to purge this room of the journals. I enjoy coming in here now. I feel like I have control again, especially now that you're here."

She couldn't help her retort, which came out with more than just a touch of sarcasm. "Must be nice." Inside she felt like she had been dealt a terrible blow. Her hopes of finding leverage against him were dwindling fast.

He didn't say anything, just watched her. He cocked his head as his eyes moved to her neck, where they lingered before coming back up to meet hers. It was a knowing look, his eyes darkening with a flash of frustration, anger maybe. She remembered the love bites and shifted uncomfortably. She hadn't renewed the glamor charm yet this morning. He crossed his arms. "Yesterday you left so early, we didn't get to have breakfast. I set my alarm so that I wouldn't miss you again." His look was predatory, his words implying the tight leash he intended to keep on her. *Pissing contest, indeed.* She sighed heavily as she pushed past him, heading for the kitchen to make breakfast.

Hermione arrived at her office at seven-thirty to find an irate Draco Malfoy. "I've been waiting an hour," he snapped.

She rolled her eyes, her tone bitter with resentment. "Yes, well. Theo has decided to be an early riser so that we can enjoy breakfast together." She put her bag in her desk drawer and turned to look at him.

His grey eyes looked worn, she realized he had been worried. She smiled sadly and her tone was genuine, reflecting the sincerity of her words. "I'm sorry I kept you waiting, it wasn't intentional. I got here as soon as I could."

His anger disappeared as he crossed to the room to pull her to him. Holding her tight, he breathed in her scent. "I missed you all day and all night. I can't go twenty-four hours without seeing you." He pulled back and wiggled his eyebrows. "How about lunch and an afternoon at a posh muggle hotel?"

She stepped back from him, pulling a headache potion out of her drawer. After swallowing it, she started to fill him in on what had happened the night before. "Theo is singing a different tune, he's had a slight change of heart." She sighed, gingerly slipping into her chair. "I'm to genuinely give him a chance for six months. At the end of that time frame, I'm free to leave him if I choose. If I do decide to leave him (or what he thinks will be a decision, since I already know I'm going to leave him) he is promising that he'll speak to his mother and reign her in. He says... he says I don't have to be intimate with him, but he doesn't want me to be intimate with you either."

Draco scoffed. "As if what he wants will change anything." His eyes scanned around her office, absently. "Still, I can't decide if his inner Hufflepuff is trying to come out or if he's even more Slytherin than I gave him credit for."

Hermione shook her head, teasing. "Draco, we've been out of Hogwarts for over ten years. Don't you think it's time to stop using House traits to characterize people's personalities and predict their actions?"

He grinned down at her, a deviant twinkle in his eye. "Talk like that will end you up over my knee."

She held her hand up. "Uh, no. Not happening. My bottom hasn't recovered from the beating you gave it Monday night."

He smirked. "Good."

After agreeing to meet with Draco in muggle London for lunch, Hermione and Lizzy spent the morning going through the files Rita had left. The infamous Ms. Skeeter had been correct. There were five applications, in addition to Moxie's, that stood out. Three female goblins had all applied for accounting positions which they were clearly more qualified for than male wizards whom had been hired. The female werewolf had applied for an interpreter position as she was fluent in over eight languages. The female witch who was hired only spoke four. Lastly, a female former house elf applied for the cafeteria head position. She had served as the Zabini's head house elf for over one hundred years and had been given clothes when she requested a salary. She had desired to be a free house elf, and while the Zabinis would not pay her, they had the decency to set her free. She was passed over for a male part Veela.

They agreed that tomorrow they would review the passed over applicant's files with a fine-toothed comb. As Hermione gathered her things to meet Draco, she felt a twinge of guilt for having his employee files in her possession. Illegally. She knew she would find a way to get the information legally once she knew what she needed. She would then destroy the copies and insist Rita do the same. Finally, she would proceed with appealing to the Wizengamot, using Malfoy Enterprise's biased practices as the catalyst for the change. ME didn't break any laws that she could tell, so it's not like the company would get into any legal trouble, but they would more than likely receive some bad press. She refused to feel guilty about that.

Hermione arrived at the London Ritz to find Draco had gotten them a suite and ordered room service for lunch. The suite was stunning. Huge windows with golden tapestry drapes. A lush king four poster bed with coverings to match the windows. Fresh flowers littered the surfaces. Their lunch was laid out on a table beside the window which displayed the hustling street below. They feasted on oysters and champagne and then wild sea trout with fresh summer vegetables and bergamot. Dessert was a delicious apricot soufflé with ice cream.

Hermione was so stuffed she could barely move. They collapsed into bed and despite their desire otherwise, both fell into a delicious slumber wrapped in each other's arms.

Hermione woke to Draco's kisses on her neck and his hands on her breasts and between her thighs, her skirt offering easy access. She whimpered wantonly as Draco's caresses became more aggressive and demanding. They undressed each other urgently, desperate for skin on skin contact. Hermione straddled him, kissing his neck, his chest, his nipples. He gave a guttural groan as she made her way down his body, taking his hard cock into the tropical heat of her mouth.

"Turn around," he commanded. "I want my mouth on you." He shifted her so her mouth could still torment him wildly, but he could taste her musky sweetness as well. Her hips straddling his shoulders, back arching to give him better access. He held her hips as he lapped and tasted, delving his tongue into the recesses of her heat. The moans emanating from her as her mouth moved up and down his length were driving him to a state of frenzy. Hermione cried out in ecstasy as her climax overtook her, her body shaking violently with her release. Draco, close but not quite there, maneuvered her down his torso and over his cock, her back to him. She impaled herself on his pulsing length even as he bucked up into her wildly, their combined breathing ragged with the exertion of their lust, their thrusts in an intense, perfect rhythm as old as time itself. More vocal than ever before, he let out a visceral exclamation as he came, his hands gripping her hips for dear life as his pleasure tore through him.

Hermione collapsed backwards, her back pressed against his chest, both of them completely out of breath. He planted soft, damp kisses on her sweat dampened temple as he rolled them onto their sides, his hands massaging her breasts. When his mouth began to nibble on her neck, he was reprimanded.

"Don't you dare!" She rolled over to face him, shaking her head, her hands tickling his sides. They both laughed as she commanded. 'No more marking my neck, or any other part of me for that matter.' She squinted her eyes and smacked his rear end playfully. "I know what you're doing."

He kissed her and grinned mischievously. "I'm just marking my territory!"

Hermione's expression and voice became more serious as she kissed him gently. "Don't make this harder for me, Draco, please. Play nice in the sandbox. If Theo were to find out I'm still, well... with you, he might not be so accommodating."

Draco let out a sigh of frustration, running his hands through his hair as he rolled onto his back. "I would hardly say he's being accommodating." He turned back to Hermione. "He still has fangs, Hermione. They're just concealed for now."

Hermione looked at him knowingly. "Yes, I know that. Which is why I don't want you marking me. He has to believe I'm not seeing you anymore. At least not in any capacity outside of work."

"Ok, you're right. No more marking you. I'm not going to stop fucking you, however." He turned to her and gave her a boyish grin. 'Or making love to you.' He kissed her tenderly. His fingers wove into her hair and pulled her head back forcefully as he kissed the underside of her jaw tenderly. "Or Dominating you... or worshipping you." His mouth moved to her

breasts where he gently took her right nipple into his mouth, his hand massaging her left. Her arousal building, she succumbed to another state of bliss as they headed into round two.

As they dressed, the frustration of their predicament began to weigh heavy on them both. Hermione was zipping her skirt, looking at herself in the full-length mirror. "I didn't tell you, but it looks like Theo has gotten rid of the journals. He said he got rid of everything that had to do with Daphne."

Draco was lacing his shoes. When finished, he stood and walked over to her, standing behind her. "You believe him?" He asked as he looked at himself in the mirror, charming away the wrinkles from his suit, which had been carelessly tossed to the floor during their earlier urgency.

She shrugged. "Well, there's nothing in the room he uses as his office anymore. I'll continue to snoop around, but if I can't find anything, I'll have to form another plan." Hermione looked at Draco's reflection in the mirror. His eyes were looking at her in the reflection of the glass yet seemed far away. "Did you hear me?" she asked with a touch of impatience.

He continued to stare, his expression unchanged, as he said, quietly. "I heard you. I'm just... thinking."

Hermione rushed home at five, pleased that Theo wasn't home yet. She brought the groceries to the kitchen and started chopping the ingredients for dinner. Once the prep was done, she went to the bedroom and changed into the jeans and t-shirt which were in her bag. She threw her hair into a pony tail and walked back into the kitchen.

When Theo got home he didn't greet her. He walked straight to the bedroom and changed. When he came back out he headed straight to the refrigerator and pulled out a bottle of mugge beer. "How was your day?" He finally asked, an edge to his voice.

Something was very wrong, and Hermione's heart began to race. She turned to him. He was in jeans and a black t-shirt, and she felt her eyes widen. He used to don dark jeans and a black tee when he wanted to do D/s scenes with her all those years ago. Her heart rate picked up another notch, and she felt dizzy. He watched her with dark, knowing eyes as he leaned against the counter and took a large swig of beer.

She turned away, focusing on the stir fry, trying to keep her hands from shaking. *He knows — what he's doing to me and what I did this afternoon!* "Umm, it was uneventful."

He stepped closer until he was directly behind her. Reaching around her, he plucked a piece of carrot out of the freshly cut vegetables. He bit into and chewed it slowly, drawing out her agony. "I stopped by your office today." His low, husky voice was right in her ear, making the soft tendrils of hair swirl with his breath, and it matched his demeanor; controlled, cool, dominating.

"Oh really?" Her voice sounded sharp, nervous. *Get it together, Hermione! Fuck. Why does he have those bloody clothes on?*

“Mmhm. I thought we could have lunch.” A loud snap of teeth biting into the carrot again made her jump with guilt and a touch of fear.

“Oh, oh... I wish I’d known you wanted to do that.” Her palms were starting to sweat, the room felt very warm. *Enough Hermione... turn the tables! NOW!*

The best defense being a good offense, she drew herself up tall, tapping into the courageous lioness within her. She turned to him and gave him a look that matched his own. “I had lunch with Draco.”

Theo was close, towering over her. She swallowed, trying not to look intimidated. He didn’t say anything, his cool eyes watching her intensely, his face a hard mask of impassivity. “I told you not to see him anymore,” he said in a quiet voice that had a very hard edge.

Standing her ground, she shook her head. “No. You told me not to *fuck* him anymore,” she snapped, the intense ball of emotion in her belly finally erupting, even as she could practically feel the anger radiating off him. Recognizing danger, she kept her voice cool and calm. “I had lunch with him to explain your new conditions. I explained I could only see him in a professional capacity going forward.”

He watched her, wanting to believe her. “And how did my *dear* friend Draco take that bit of information?” He slowly stepped back as he spoke, leaning against the counter behind him.

“Actually, he took it fine. He said to find him in six months.” Her mind was racing, deciding it would be best to play down her and Draco’s feelings for each other.

He grinned, wickedly, his eyes scanning her up and down, as he gave her a disbelieving and condescending smile. “Oh, Kitten. See, I might have actually believed you until that last little lie came out of your sweet little mouth.” He shook his head, taking another large swallow of beer. He set the bottle down. ‘I know Draco very well, and I would venture that what *really* happened is he simply stated you would ignore my directive and continue to see each other behind my back.’ He re-approached her so that he was hovering over her, once again. He planted his hands on either side of the counter behind her, trapping her in. His eyes were dark. “And — as I know you so very well — I would venture a guess you didn’t disagree with him. I would gamble that you spent a nice, *romantic* afternoon *fucking* in a fancy muggle hotel.” The word romantic was sarcastic, the word fucking was terrifying.

Her heart pounding, Hermione pushed him away, stepping around him to the opposite side of the kitchen. Her words came out rushed. “We had lunch. He... he reserved a suite anticipating a romantic afternoon, but it ended up being a long talk and us breaking it off.” The blood in her veins raced as the lie fell almost too easily from her lips. “I told him about the deal you offered and that I was going to be true to my word.” She looked up into his eyes, willing him to believe her deceit.

He watched her, contemplating, and for the first time Hermione allowed herself to relax a little. “Is that true? Is that really true, Hermione? Because so help me Merlin, if I find out you’re still fucking him I’m... I’m...” He broke himself off to take a calming breath. “Well, let’s just say neither one of us want to find out what I might do.” His tone was every bit as threatening as his words.

“Theo, I agreed to your conditions. I won’t go back on my word.” A deep sense of loss overcame her when she realized the words were true. She could not be reckless about this.

Clearly, he was having her followed. She would have to give up Draco until she found a way out of this mess.

Chapter 23

Thursday

Hermione and Lizzy spent hours fine tuning which pieces of evidence they needed from the files. The deeper they investigated, the more they found. It wasn't necessarily blatant discrimination, but there were patterns. Patterns that, because they were not noticed or addressed, led to what ended up being discrimination. Since Hermione knew she couldn't use stolen files, she would have to find a way to legally obtain the evidence she needed. They would start by interviewing the females whom they were going to use as case studies. Hermione sent an owl to Rita Skeeter arranging to meet that afternoon.

At 11:30, Hermione left her office to meet Draco for lunch at the public restaurant she had designated in the owl she had sent him this morning, simply listing the time and place. His response had come quickly that he would be there. She felt nauseated, sick with grief for what she was about to do, but she knew she didn't have a choice. Meeting him visibly would prevent him from making a scene and would prove to whomever Theo had tailing her that she wasn't meeting him for a tryst.

When she arrived, Draco was already there waiting for her at a table in a back corner of the restaurant. She slowly approached the dimly lit alcove; her heart was pounding and her emotions in utter turmoil. He stood to greet her when she reached him, his expression anticipatory, but suspicious. When they sat, his knowing eyes watched her from across the table, she refused to meet his gaze.

His lovely tenor voice was tense, quiet, and dangerously controlled. "A public restaurant, you won't look at me..." He trailed off, taking a deep breath before continuing. "What's going on, Granger? What's changed? What's Theo done now?"

Hermione swallowed heavily and had just opened her mouth to answer when the waiter approached to review the lunch specials. Hermione didn't order anything other than a cup of tea. Draco ordered a fire whiskey and waved off the waiter impatiently.

His control slipping, he demanded. "Tell me, Granger. What's changed?" The tremor of anger, and maybe a bit of fear, in his voice was noticeable.

Her defeated, golden eyes finally came up to meet his, heartbreak etched into the planes of her face. "I can't do this, Draco. Theo... he knows we spent the afternoon at The Ritz yesterday. He's obviously having me followed." She kept her tone low, her eyes casting discreetly to the tables around them.

Draco watched her, tension seething from him, his jaw muscles flexing as he ground his teeth. "What happened," he growled, his fury becoming increasingly evident even though his voice was deathly quiet.

"He basically threatened me." She looked down at her hands, clenching them into a ball on the table in front of her, willing them not to shake. 'I told him I would give him six months and he's holding me to that. I have to keep my word.' She looked up, imploring him to

understand, eyes glassy with unshed tears of frustration. “Draco, if... if I don’t do as I promised, those photos will...”

He interrupted her. “Fuck the photos!” His voice intense and husky; his gaze dark and non-relenting.

Hermione’s eyes locked with his in surprise and her mouth fell open. “What?” she asked. It was barely a whisper.

They stared at each for a moment. He let out a slow breath, his eyes suddenly soft, all anger gone and replaced by warmth and reassurance. “I’ve thought of nothing else since Monday night, Hermione. I... I think you realize I’m in love with you. I’ll... that is *we’ll*... tackle this together. I’ll have my public relations team spin the whole thing. We’ll find a way to make you look like the victim. Or we’ll just ignore it, and it’ll eventually become old news.” He reached out to take her hand but she pulled away, trembling, her eyes scanning around them to see if anyone was watching. Her jumpiness unnerved him, he was going to kill Theo. He couldn’t even touch her hand?

He closed his eyes briefly, working to reign in the fury that was threatening to spill over yet again before continuing, his voice laced with emotion. “I should have said these words to you Monday night and I should have said them yesterday. I’m sorry I didn’t, but I’m saying them now. Hell, I’m begging you, Hermione. Please. Forget about the photos. Let’s just be together, we’ll get through this. Together.”

Hermione’s eyes welled and her throat became tight. She was completely overcome. He was saying what she secretly desired him to all along. Her heart swelled with love for the man sitting across from her, but knowing his true feelings changed nothing for her. She shook her head, minutely. She would not take him down with her. His confession just made her that much more adamant to protect him and his reputation.

Caramel eyes fixed determinedly on steel, her voice was strong and non-wavering. “Draco, no.” She swallowed a sob when his face dropped. “You can’t. You’re just getting the Malfoy reputation restored. You’ve worked so hard, I won’t let you throw that away for me. Your parents... your parents would *hate* me. More than they already do, and I can’t go through that again.”

Draco cocked a silver eyebrow, a hint of indignation in his expression and voice. “My parents are nothing like Ezmirelda Nott.”

Hermione shook her head adamantly. “No, Draco. It’s moot. I don’t want the photos spread... period. I have my business to think about as well, you know.” She looked down at her hands. She was resolved to her fate. ‘I’ll continue to try to find a way out of this.’ She looked up, meeting his gaze. “I’ll find a way, Draco.”

“And if you don’t?”

She shrugged. “If I don’t, then in six months I’ll be a free woman. Theo will handle his mother. I’ll come to you and if you still... still want me, we’ll be together.”

Draco shook his head, frustration and anguish on his face. “How can you even say that? Of course, I’ll still want you! I’ve waited for you, wanted you, since I was fourteen. I think I can wait another six months.” He leaned back in his chair, rage brewing beneath the surface, once

again. “The thing is, I don’t believe for a second he’ll keep his promise. Six months from now he’ll continue to blackmail you, manipulate you.”

Hermione wiped the tear that escaped. She was still overcome by his confession and proposition. Her voice shook as she replied. “If that happens, and I still don’t have a way out of his mother’s talons, I’ll... I’ll let you decide the course of action. I’ll do what you advise. If you still want me to leave him and ignore the consequences, then that’s what I’ll do. If you... if you don’t want that anymore, for whatever reason, I’ll do as you say. But, for now, I want to do it my way.”

His tone was bitter. “Because your way is working so well.” He rolled his eyes and swallowed the fire whisky down as soon as it was placed in front of him.

“Please, Draco. Please have faith in me and my choice. I need your support or I’ll never get through this.” Her hands trembled as she lifted her tea cup to her mouth.

His eyes moved from hers to her mouth as she sipped her tea and back to her eyes again. His hard expression slowly morphed to one of resignation. “Oh, Pet. Of course, you have my support.” He shifted in his seat, drawing himself upright. His eyes darkening slightly, his voice morphing into a Dominant edge. “But in six months, if he doesn’t keep his word, then you’re mine. I’m holding you to your promise. You’ll do as I say. Understood?”

She nodded and smiled softly. “Yes. Understood.”

Hermione felt a familiar flutter in her stomach as his stormy, turbulent, Dominant eyes stayed fixed on hers. The pull to him was almost more than she could take. She wanted nothing more than to crawl across the table into his lap and beg him to do with her what he would.

His jaw tensed as he read her reaction. His hands itched to reach for her, pull her across the table, slam her into the wall and claim her. Right here. Right now. Restaurant full of lunchgoers be damned.

She looked away, her heart tripping over itself, blood rushing to her core. She shifted in her seat, seeking friction. *Mother of Merlin what this man does to me!* She sucked in a deep calming breath and shook her head, willing herself to be strong. She had to get out of there. She grabbed her bag from beside her. Still not looking at him, knowing she would lose it if she did, the painful words came out choked. “I... I have to go.”

Her words deflated him, reality crashing down. “Please, Hermione. Please reconsider.” He was desperate, and he didn’t care that she saw it.

She chanced a look at his face, his sorrow written all over it. His plea broke her heart and she lost what little control she had left. She couldn’t help the sob that escaped as she whispered. “I love you, Draco.” She jumped up and dashed away from the table. Her head down so that no one could see her grief-stricken features.

It took every ounce of Draco’s control not to run after her. As he sat alone, recounting and absorbing what had just happened. The reality and finality of what they were facing sunk in. *Six months!* The longer he sat, the more furious he became. He let it creep over him, welcoming it. Anger was a familiar emotion, an emotion he understood. Heartbreak was not. He was not a man who cried, his days of being a victim were over. He was not a scared

teenager anymore. He was a grown man. A grown man who knew what he wanted. A grown man who would not let another man keep him from what he wanted. Never again. The one thing he knew for sure was that Hermione was his. He'd be damned if anyone was going to lay claim to what was his. He'd be damned if he would let anyone hurt her, manipulate her... touch her. He closed his eyes, breathing deeply. Six months... it was too long.

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Hermione Apparated to her office from the restaurant and (after a good cry) pulled herself together. She wasn't doing herself any favors by falling apart. She needed to have a clear head. In order to get through this, she needed to be strong; she needed to be smart and she needed to be cunning. She needed to think and act like a Slytherin. *Merlin, now I'm doing it.* She huffed a silent laugh at herself.

She freshened up her face and greeted Rita with confidence and determination. She would let no one see the evidence of her inner turmoil. They hashed out more details and Rita agreed to help with the interviews. They needed solid evidence. Evidence other than what the files showed. The experiences the victims had would be a good start. The sooner she could get solid proof and testimony before the review board, the better. They agreed to meet again on Monday afternoon.

Thursday Evening

Theo watched his witch as she despondently picked at her dinner. The private investigator had told him of her lunch with Draco. He had seen the photos. She had finally told the backstabbing bastard. He knew it to be true based on both her behavior and the evidence presented. While a big part of him was seething over the fact she had likely lied about the Ritz encounter, it appeared she had finally kept her word. He would have to find a way to keep her in line. She hadn't taken him seriously. Not until he threatened her, but threatening her had worked. She had broken it off. He hated that it had come down to threats. He didn't want her to be afraid of him. It was not who he was, certainly not who he wanted to be.

He slowly chewed and swallowed, still watching her. He smirked to himself as he recalled her reaction to his change of clothes the night before. He was right. She *had* forgotten. He would be sure to remind her... frequently. *I know you so well my little Kitten. You'll be purring underneath me soon enough.* He smiled as he picked up his wine glass and took a swallow.

Hermione shuddered when she looked up from her plate to find Theo smiling at her. He wasn't quite smiling because he was with her... more *at* her, so to speak. Like he had a secret he had no intention of sharing. She pushed her plate away with disgust, having only eaten a few bites.

"Now, Kitten, you know you need to eat more than that. Finish at least half of what's on your plate."

Hermione couldn't help her reaction. Her jaw fell open, her mind reeling with rage. *How dare he!* It was a slap in the face. How dare he deliver *five years too late* what she had craved. How dare he talk to her like this and how dare he think she would stand for it. She would

never be that for him again; the doting wife who craved his Dominance. His was the wrong kind. It felt false, manipulative, and far too late! She ignored him, taking a long swallow of her wine instead.

Theo didn't let her defiance bother him, she would come around. After a week or so, she would miss what he could do to her, what Draco had been doing to her. He swallowed that bitter pill heavily. Draco had touched her; he couldn't change that.

Before he let himself become too worked up or enraged over this fact, he reminded himself that it was his own damned fault. He did this. He brought it all on. He closed his eyes, forcing himself to reign in the frustration, the anger, the impatience. He had six months. He had six months to make her remember. Six months to make her fall in love with him again. But, God willing, she would give in to his touches and his desires and his Dominance much, much sooner than that

Saturday

Saturday came around quickly and yet so slowly at the same time. She didn't want it to be Saturday. What if Theo decided to pressure her? She had been sleeping next to him for five nights. He had kept his word and not so much as touched her, but it was Saturday. For the past five years, Saturday had meant sex. To make it all worse, she hadn't seen Draco since Wednesday and she was missing him so much it was painful. The past seventy-two hours had dragged horribly, and her heart was in tatters in its wake.

She turned her head to Theo's sleeping form, he was laying on his side facing her. Hermione watched him sleep, remembering how she used to pepper his face with kisses, marvel at his long eyelashes — eyelashes that many witches would kill for. She had always found him so attractive. She still did if she was being totally honest with herself. His blue eyes were his best feature. They were stunning and the contrast with his pale skin and dark hair had made him irresistible to her. *Had* being the key word. His betrayal of her — *of them* — had made him unattractive to her heart. She flinched when his eyes opened, catching her watching him.

He gave her a soft smile. "Good morning, Kitten," he whispered. His voice groggy with sleep.

She rolled away and out of bed. "Morning," she replied in a distant, impersonal tone, not looking at him. She stepped into the bathroom and turned on the shower. She stripped down and stepped inside, pulling the curtain closed behind her.

She reveled in the sensation of the water running over her hair, her face, her body — caressing her. She closed her eyes as the water ran in rivulets down her face, soaking her hair and eyelashes, and dripping off her chin and the tips of her breasts. She could almost imagine the drum of the water was Draco's hands; his mouth on her breasts, his cock rubbing against her belly. She shivered as her hands mimicked what his would do. His lean, muscular form rubbing up against her, the coarse hairs of his body sending electric currents over her smooth skin, his masculinity towering over her, his hands massaging her tense muscles, his eyes drinking in her femininity. She yearned to feel his soft skin over his hard body, his lips on hers, his tongue dominating her mouth. She imagined the taste of his mouth, his skin. Her hands on his shoulders, his chest, his torso. She leaned her body against the shower wall and goose bumps bloomed on her extremities from the cool as her hands continued to add to her

imagination. She could picture him so perfectly — pressed against her, preventing her weak knees from letting her collapse. Her back against the wall as his mouth worked her nipples and his fingers teased her slick core. Sensation was everywhere as the powerful jets of the shower hit her nipples in just the right way. Her hands rubbed and stimulated where she needed it most. She spread her legs more as her fingers slid in and out of her wet heat, her other hand massaging her clit.

Just as she felt herself letting go, her release fast approaching, she was jolted out of her fantasy as Theo walked into the bathroom straight to the toilet and proceeded to relieve himself on just the other side of the curtain. Her heart pounding, her arousal completely doused as if someone had turned on frigid water, she slowly caught her breath as she reached for the shampoo, clumsily wiping the water out of her eyes and off her face. She heard him proceed to brush his teeth after the toilet flushed. She just wanted him to get out. What used to be such a normal every morning occurrence now just felt like a massive infringement on her privacy.

When she finally came out of the bathroom (having taken extra time trying to postpone the inevitable — a full day with Theo), she found a cooked breakfast waiting for her on the kitchen table. Damned if it didn't look and smell delicious, too. She had hardly eaten anything all week. Not just because of a loss of appetite, but also her desire to thwart Theo's attempts at nice evening meals together. She knew she needed to stop wearing her feelings on her sleeve. She had promised him to try, and ignoring him, being dismissive and non-engaging was doing nothing to lead him to believe she was trying. These six months needed to count or he could fairly accuse her of not holding up her end of the bargain. Swallowing her bitterness, she smiled begrudgingly at him and sat down to eat.

As they cleared the table, Hermione knew it was time to address what she hoped wouldn't be a huge problem. "Theo," she said as she rinsed the last dish. "I, uh, adopted a familiar when I left." She put the dish in the cabinet and turned to him.

"Really?" He asked. His expression appearing genuinely curious.

She nodded. "Yep, a cat. A..." She let out a short laugh. 'A rather large cat. A Maine Coon.' She met his eyes. "I don't want to give her up, but clearly I can't leave her at my... at the apartment. I need to bring her here. Is that going to be a problem?"

A flirtatious smile came over his face. "Well, I don't know." He toyed, pretending he might deny her.

She smiled at him. "Don't be a tease. I'm bringing her and you'll deal with it." With that she walked out of the room leaving a smirking Theo behind. It was a touch — just a taste — of the old Hermione. He welcomed it, basked in it, and drank it in.

Theo's jaw dropped when Hermione appeared thirty minutes later with the largest cat he had ever seen. The cat looked familiar somehow, but he couldn't place where he'd seen her.

"Her name is Cassiopeia," Hermione instructed, as she put the cat down on the sofa. "But I call her Beauty."

"Umm, you were right... she's big. I mean, she's *huge*. She's bigger than Mrs. Norris, and that was the biggest cat I had ever seen." Theo watched as the grey monster nuzzled

Hermione's hand, compelling her to stroke her head before sliding off the sofa to explore her new home.

Hermione had also brought more clothes and personal items from her apartment and proceeded to walk towards the bedroom, Theo on her heels. "When are you moving out of the other place?" He asked, his tone in no way disguising his intention that this was what he expected her to do. "I mean, there's no need for you to keep the flat."

Hermione proceeded to put clothes away and didn't look at him as she answered. "I signed a one-year lease and it has a no sublet clause. So, I won't be getting rid of it." She turned to him and looked at him dead on, daring him to pick a fight.

Theo sensed the pointless argument ahead and decided to avoid it. "So, what do you want to do today? Do you want to go to muggle London and see a show? Maybe grab dinner in the city? We could invite your friends?"

She shook her head. "Theo, I'm not really up for any of that. Besides, my friends don't know that I'm living with you again. I haven't told them yet."

He swallowed and nodded. In truth, he had no desire to see her friends. He was just trying to be nice.

He sat on the chair next to the sofa. His voice was soft, vulnerable somehow. "Well, what would you like to do? I mean, we could... you know... talk if you want? About what happened, I mean... do you have questions? I promise to be completely honest."

Hermione was shocked he had just offered up this conversation. The truth was she did have questions, but she didn't want to give him the satisfaction of knowing she cared. She studied him silently, not answering as her mind swam with the random questions that had popped into her head over the past weeks.

He looked at her knowingly. "I know you have questions. I know you don't want to care about the answers, but I also know you do care, Hermione. You wouldn't be *you* if you didn't. So how about I just tell you some things."

Hermione shook her head. Her words abrupt, her response out of her mouth before she could stop herself. "You know what, Theo? It really doesn't matter. You cheated, you lied, you betrayed me. You deceived me and deprived me of the man I married..." She trailed off, giving him what she hoped was a blasé, indifferent shrug and huffed. "That's all that matters. In the end, that's all I need to know."

The wounded look on Theo's face was visceral. Heavy silence permeated the room. He shook it off and met her eyes. "Hermione, either we talk, or we go to counseling and talk to a stranger. It's one or the other. I know that in order for you to give us a fair chance, you need all the facts. You need to know what happened. I need to tell you. It will be therapeutic for me as well." He paused. "And I... I want to know how you and Draco came about. I have many questions regarding your relationship with him." The scrutinizing and accusatory look he was giving left her with no doubt he wanted answers.

She sighed heavily and rolled her eyes, not caring if she looked like a child being forced into an uncomfortable conversation with a parent. It was exactly how she felt. She had lost free will in this relationship. She may not be *sexually* submissive to Theo anymore, but the

blackmail that was being held over her left her submissive to his will in every way. It was unsettling and unwelcome. She walked to the sofa and sat down. "Fine." She snapped.

He watched her for a minute and when she didn't ask anything he cocked his eyebrow. "Well? You going to ask me anything?"

She rolled her eyes up to the ceiling and huffed. "When we went to Hawaii for our two-year anniversary, were you already seeing her?"

Theo shook his head slowly. "No, it didn't start until a couple months after that. You know, when you started working those long hours."

Hermione nodded, a tiny flutter of relief zinged through her. She was grateful that the Hawaii trip wasn't tainted with his betrayal. It had been a wonderful adventure for them; probably the best trip they had ever taken.

She looked down at her hands which were clasped tensely on her lap, her knuckles white with stress. She really didn't want to talk about this.

Theo watched her and when she didn't come forward with another question, he asked. "How did you and Draco happen? Who initiated it?"

Hermione's eyes shot up to his, she really didn't want to tell him anything about Draco. It was private and none of his business. Besides, it would probably just make him angry. "Theo, I don't see where it's any of..."

An edge to his voice, he interrupted her. "Hermione, stop right there. You admitted to being with him before you and I broke up... before you knew about..." He looked down, ashamed, his voice softening. 'Before you knew about Daphne and me.' He looked back up and met her eyes. "You are guilty of adultery as well." His voice was firm but not harsh.

Hermione's eyes were on his, hard in their conviction. "Theo, don't... you... dare." Her voice was low, venomous, deadly. 'Don't you dare try to play the victim in all this. I would have *never* gotten involved with Draco, or any other man for that matter, if I hadn't felt so lost. Lost because you were absent from our marriage in every way. A mannequin could have taken your place at the table, in front of the TV, or lying next to me at night. A dildo could have sufficed for our cold, impersonal Saturday night routine.' Theo flinched. Her anger grew with each word spoken. Her outrage at her situation, her disgust with her pathetic husband bloomed with each utterance. "You are despicable, Theo. A manipulative, blackmailing, self-serving, pathetic excuse of a man. I have so much hate for you right now..." Her voice was shaking, goosebumps rippled down her arms, her heart was thudding with fury.

Theo didn't move. He had never seen her like this. He had pushed her too far, too soon. He shouldn't have forced this conversation on her. He swallowed heavily. She was right. He was all those things. However, those things were a means to an end. He was desperate and would do whatever he had to do to make her come around.

After regaining the ability to speak, he spoke softly. He didn't betray any anger or resentment and attempted to infuse his tone with truthfulness. "I'll take your hate, Hermione. I'll relish in it, because it means you care. It means there's hope. I'm going to make all this up to you. You'll see. I am still the man you married seven years ago. At the end of six months,

“You’re impossible!” Hermione snapped, heart sinking at his words. She stood up. “And this conversation is over.” She walked away and into their bedroom, slamming the door.

When Hermione emerged an hour later, Theo wasn't there. The apartment was blessedly empty. She poured herself a glass of water and gulped it down. Her thirst having been what drew her out of the bedroom in the first place. She stroked Beauty who had pranced over, anxious for some attention. Hermione looked around, relishing the quiet and the privacy of his absence. "Beauty, I'll never survive six months." She leaned forward and kissed the cat's soft head as she thought about Draco, wondering what he was doing.

Theo walked in the front door not much later, relieved to find Hermione sitting on the sofa. The latest edition of *Transfiguration Today* on her lap. He put the groceries away and walked towards her. His voice soft, his tone conciliatory. “I know you’re mad and I shouldn’t have forced you into a conversation you weren’t ready for. It won’t happen again.”

"I'll just... be in the office," he said as he walked away.

Hermione exhaled as she sat at her desk. It had been a weekend of awkward silences and tension filled rooms. Theo had left her pretty well alone, and as the weekend progressed her anger had diminished. She still hated him, but by Saturday night she had regained her composure, and by Sunday she was able to at least exchange a few civil words with him.

Perhaps Daphne's husband could be useful. Did he even know about his wife's infidelity? Maybe he would be angry enough to divorce Daphne? Disclose all to The Daily Prophet? Theo would be outed as a cheater, garnering Hermione public support. Perhaps Adrian would feel the victim and sympathize with Hermione's plight? The two wronged individuals could stand together, he could threaten to out the infidelity unless the pictures were destroyed? Hermione knew she was grasping at nothing. What would Adrian care about her?

She let out a heavy sigh as she started flipping through the morning posts. She felt a lump in her throat when she recognized the spikey script of Draco Malfoy. She was just about to open it when she heard loud voices outside her closed office door.

"I'll tell her you're here. Please just have a seat..."

The haughty witch's response was clearly none other than Ezmirelda Nott and Hermione's stomach tightened uncomfortably. "I don't have time to wait, I have my morning tea with the First Wizarding Families of Britain in less than thirty minutes."

Hermione's door was tossed open as the towering witch stalked in. Lizzy's look was apologetic as she walked in behind the old bat.

Hermione smiled softly at her secretary. "It's ok Lizzy, just shut the door behind you."

Lizzy nodded, her expression flustered as she scampered out, gently closing the door.

Ezmirelda glanced around Hermione's office, not sitting and not touching anything. Her silk, grey robes were exquisite and probably cost more than Hermione's entire wardrobe combined. The snooty witch's gaze landed on Hermione after slowly taking in the entire room. Perhaps it was a touch of insanity, but Hermione almost burst out laughing. She felt the wretched woman could give Lucius Malfoy a run for his money in the contemptuous expressions department. Fortunately, she controlled her need to laugh maniacally and braced herself for the unknown.

"I've just come from a quick visit with my son. Care to explain why he isn't himself? Why he is still unhappy?" She paced to Hermione's window. 'He tried to disguise it, but I could tell.' She turned back towards Hermione. "A mother knows her son." She pursed her lips. "Was I not clear? Here I thought you were supposed to be so smart. What is it they say? 'The brightest witch of her age?'" She rolled her eyes. "Clearly you fooled them, because even the most *stupid* witch would have understood what I required."

Hermione was about to speak when the older witch quickly stepped up to Hermione's desk to tower over her threateningly. "I didn't simply want you to return to him, I want him to be *happy*. I shouldn't have to spell out what that means."

Hermione stood up in a huff of indignation. "Your son cheated on me for five years, Ezmilrelda. *Five years!*"

Ezmirelda let out a "Hmpf!" and then continued. 'Then *obviously* you weren't meeting his *needs* now were you.' She took a deep breath. "I warned him. I warned him you weren't witch enough to make him happy." Another sigh as she looked Hermione up and down. "But for some reason he desires you and thinks he loves you. Unfortunately, the fact is, he married you, so he is *stuck* with you. Divorce will never be an option, even *if* he were to regain his senses." She started to walk towards the door. "Do your wifely duties, Hermione."

She stopped before opening the door and looked back at her. "Those photos clearly show you know how the parts work." She turned towards the door and then abruptly turned back again. 'Oh, which reminds me. Grandsons. I need grandsons to carry on the House of Nott. Don't make me wait too long.' She smiled evilly at her. "The next time I see my son, I'll expect to see that twinkle in his eye and a genuine smile on his face." With that she flung open the door and paraded out, not bothering to close it behind her.

Hermione collapsed back into her chair. Her fists in her hair. *The gall of that woman!* Coming to terms with the fact that she would have to sleep with her husband, she swallowed heavily, preventing the bile that was threatening to come up into her mouth. Perhaps she could talk to Harry, he was an Auror after all. Maybe it was time to get the authorities involved. The thought of him seeing the photos made her ill, though. Who else would he have to show them to? It was so incredibly private. She couldn't bear him or anyone else seeing her like that. Besides, it wasn't like she had never slept with Theo. She could close her eyes and imagine she was somewhere else, yeah? It's not like she hadn't done that a hundred times before. She would not let herself get pregnant, though, that was for sure.

She closed her eyes and sighed heavily. Draco was right. Conceivably this was a winless battle and she should just let the photos be released. Or maybe it was all a bluff? The reality was Ezmirelda was never going to let Theo get a divorce. She wouldn't put it past the bitch to blackmail her own son to prevent a divorce tarnishing the Nott name. If that was the case, why was Hermione even bothering with Theo? She was having serious doubts he would be able to convince Ezmirelda to destroy those photos when the time came. Ezmirelda Nott was Hermione's personal hell.

"Hermione? Sorry to interrupt. I thought you could use some tea."

"Thanks," Hermione said softly as she took the cup from Lizzy.

"Are you ok? I couldn't help but overhear. It's not my business and I'll say nothing... of course, but if you need someone to talk to, I'm here."

Hermione looked into the soft green eyes of the woman who was not only her assistant, but who had become like a mother to her. The stress of the impossible situation she was in weighed her down and the tears started to fall against her will. Lizzy dashed around the desk and took Hermione in her arms. "That's it, Hermione. You have a good cry. Get it all out."

An hour later, Hermione had divulged it all to Lizzy. The older woman sat quietly, not interrupting, but listening and absorbing. When Hermione finished, Lizzy made a fresh pot of tea and handed Hermione her cup. "Dear, you cannot do this to yourself. You will be miserable if you stay with Theo. Draco loves you, and I think he's got the right of it. Call her bluff. If she releases the photos, well... It will be unpleasant, certainly, but in time it will be old news."

She smiled at Hermione, a twinkle in her eye. "And Hermione, you do realize that most couples have experimented with various sex games, scenarios... fetishes and the like, right? You might find you have a whole new audience interested in what you have to say if those photos get released. It's the twenty-first century. So, you like a little kink! More power to you, I say. Your autobiography would sell out in a heartbeat. The public is already very interested in everything you do, and as a perk, you could expose Ezmirelda Nott for her blackmail. She could wind up in some serious legal trouble. Don't let it slip your notice that she has a lot to lose by releasing those pictures."

Hermione sipped her tea and listened carefully to Lizzy's advice. While she knew her assistant was most likely right, she just couldn't bear the thought of those photos getting out. It's all well and good to give that kind of advice when it's not your naked body on display. Her body... in all kinds of angles and all kinds of positions. Hermione shivered at the thought of those blasted photos of her giving Theo head getting released, pictures of her spread open,

pictures of her getting spanked, being bound. The photographs were color and graphic and, as they were wizarding photos, there was movement. It was crude, it was unfathomable, and no matter what, Hermione did not want them released. Not until every other option had been exhausted. She smiled warmly at Lizzy. "Thank you, I'm going to think about what you've said. You're a wonderful friend."

Lizzy took her hand and told her warmly. "I never had a daughter, Hermione, but if I did, I would want her to be just like you. The truth is, I consider you like my daughter. If you were mine, Ezmirelda Nott would be one sorry witch right now. I would go after her with everything I have."

"Thank you, Lizzy. I feel the same about you. I adore you and appreciate you more than you could ever realize." She leaned forward and hugged the woman tightly.

Lizzy smiled as they pulled apart. "Well, on that note, I have work to do. I'll leave you to your posts. Let me know if I can do anything for you."

"Thank you," Hermione said again, watching her step out of the office and back to her own desk. Hermione went into the bathroom and cleared her face with her wand before coming back to her desk and reading her posts. She picked up the post from earlier with Draco's elegant, spikey writing and ripped it open.

H,

I can't take this. I'm going out of my mind! Any update? Have you found anything? I've hired two PI's. One is following Theo and one is following Ezmirelda. Please, can I see you? Somehow? I can't stand not knowing if you're ok. Please...

D

Hermione clutched the note to her chest, fighting back overwhelming emotion. She grabbed a quill and parchment to reply.

D,

Missing you so much I can hardly breath. I am fine. I am safe... untouched. Brilliant idea to hire the PI's. Hopefully, they'll discover something useful. It's too risky to see each other, but I'm yours in every way. You are constantly in my thoughts: when I wake up, when I'm eating, when I'm bathing, when I'm at work, when I'm sitting across the table from my awful husband, when I go to bed... It's always you on my mind. I'm yours... Love you...

H

She re-read the note. There was no point on telling him about Ezmirelda's visit. She would tell him eventually. She sealed it and tucked it in her bag to send when she left work.

Chapter 24

Trigger warning: Non-con, arguable rape in this chapter

Monday Evening

That evening, Hermione sat across from Theo as they quietly ate dinner. He was still walking on egg shells around her, regretting what had happened Saturday. It had ruined his plans for the weekend and had done nothing to bring her closer. He simply ate, watching her, doing his best not to upset her.

Hermione refused to look at him as she moved the peas around on her plate, too anxious and depressed to eat. Ezmirelda's visit from earlier weighed heavy on her mind. She briefly contemplated telling Theo about his mother's visit, but this time she knew better. She would not make the mistake of offering up her body to him on a silver platter, which is essentially what she would be doing if he knew about Ezmirelda's demand.

She could feel his eyes on her, knowing he wanted to engage her in conversation. Willing herself to think about anything else, she ignored him as she dredged up memories from her afternoon meeting with Rita. Everything was working out beautifully. The three goblins, the werewolf, and the house elf had all met with Rita over the weekend. If presented in just the right way, their statements, combined with Moxie's, would hopefully compel the review board to grant Hermione's request. Her request being to have certain employee files subpoenaed from Malfoy Enterprises.

Thoughts of Malfoy Enterprises caused Draco to be pulled to the forefront of her mind; which caused visions of beautiful grey eyes, soft but strong hands, tender lips, arms that knew how to hold her, a voice that knew how to seduce her, a palm that knew how to subdue her. She shut her eyes and took a slow deep breath. A calmness came over her. A calmness interrupted by the wizard sitting across from her.

"I know you are still mad at me and I'm not trying to force you into any deep conversations, but if we could engage in *some* sort of interaction instead of silence and avoidance, it would be nice."

Hermione could tell he was struggling to keep the irritation out of his voice. She knew he was frustrated. She wished she could see the man she married behind those blue eyes, it would be so much easier. Now she could only see the man he had become. Regardless, she needed him to believe she was giving him a chance. He needed to believe she was really trying. Otherwise, this whole charade was for nothing.

Trying to keep the hostility out of her voice, she nodded slightly. "I will try." She took a sip from her wine glass. "Why don't you tell me about your day," she suggested, trying to keep her voice from sounding strained and to keep her face from showing the tension she felt.

With that, Hermione watched as Theo's lips moved. She observed him as he talked and talked, but barely heard what he said. She focused on maintaining her fake interest. She

nodded occasionally and responded with a well-placed “Uh-huh” every now and then so that he felt she was engaged.

“You going to answer? What do you think?” He was looking at her expectantly, an eyebrow cocked.

The change in tone and volume of his voice grabbed her attention. “Huh?” She snapped to attention, suddenly realizing he had asked her a question.

“Are you even listening to me, Hermione?” He was clearly irritated, and perhaps a touch hurt as well, judging by the look in his eyes.

Trying to redeem herself, she responded quickly. “Yes, of course I am. You were talking about storing the newspapers, right?”

He sighed and shook his head, a slight rolling of his eyes. “Well, yeah, about five minutes ago.” After a pause, he continued. “I was talking about the convention in Philadelphia.” He said impatiently, no longer looking at her, but down at his plate instead. She couldn’t help but notice how crestfallen he looked even though he was desperately trying to mask it with his anger.

Shit. She internally scolded herself for being careless. Having him irritated with her was not good. She tried for a touch of honesty. “I’m sorry, Theo. I didn’t mean for my mind to wander. I go before the review board on Thursday and my thoughts keep going back to Moxie’s case.”

He sipped his wine, his eyes back on hers. “Moxie? That goblin you’re representing?” His tone was suspicious.

“Yes, Theo. The same case I was working on before. The goblin who was passed over by Malfoy Enterprises.” She tried not to sound impatient. She had talked about this case during many dinners before she had left him.

He put his fork down and tossed his napkin on the table next to his plate. He watched her a minute before responding. “I don’t like you seeing him, Hermione. Even if it is related to business.” His eyes were dark, his voice low and demanding. “It would be best if you don’t find yourself alone with him. I would likely find out and I would definitely not be pleased.”

She met his eyes and there was no mistaking who was sitting across from her now. It appeared Theo had taken a page from Draco’s book. They were now *both* masters at flipping a switch and going from normal conversationalists to controlling Dominants at the drop of a pin. The difference between the two, other than the fact that Draco’s Dominance was desired and Theo’s was unwelcome, was that Draco knew how to carry it through. Draco’s Dominance wasn’t limited to the bedroom as Theo’s had always been. Although, it seemed that Theo’s was no longer limited to the bedroom either. His newly found leverage over her seemed to agree with him.

She met his eyes, her voice determined. “I’ll make no promises that I won’t find myself alone with him during the course of the case that I am working on. I do promise, however, that it will be kept strictly professional if it happens. I have given you my word and I intend to keep it.”

He watched her, sipping his wine. His Dominant gaze unwavering. “Hmm, so you say.” He leaned slightly forward. “But, how would you feel Hermione? How would you feel if my work left me in Daphne’s presence? How would you feel if she were somehow involved in my daily work?” His eyebrows were raised, a touch of presumptive cockiness in his voice. Clearly, he thought he had made some kind of point.

Hermione couldn’t resist. A smirk on her face and she gave him a look of contempt. “I would be thrilled, Theo. I could wish for nothing more. Please, by all means, desire her, fuck her, *marry* her. *Nothing* would make me happier. It would certainly get me out of *this* nightmare, wouldn’t it?”

His response was instant, and because of it, her regret was profound. In a flash, he was on her. Grabbing her by the shoulders, he had her out of her chair and pushed against the wall before she could even take a breath to protest. His face stopped inches from hers, his voice was deep, almost a growl. His hands tightened on her arms as he pushed her more deeply against the wall, pressing his body against hers. “I’m sick of this, Hermione. You are my *wife*!”

Hermione swallowed, a heady combination of turned on and terrified washed over her as she realized she had poked the dragon. “Theo I...”

His menacing tone continued, his voice low with pent up rage as he interrupted her. “No! Don’t say anything. I think I’ve heard enough, *Kitten*.” Only Kitten was not said with anything resembling affection or playfulness, it reeked of sarcasm, anger... danger. Her pulse quickened, her breath hitched, heat pooled in her belly even as she started to tremble with fear. She mentally chastised herself; her body was reacting to the dominance, but her mind was afraid of him.

“Being nice to you gets me nowhere. I’ve figured that out over the past week. You won’t be civil. You won’t talk. You won’t *participate*. You’re not *trying*, Hermione!” His voice was now almost a whisper as he leaned so close that his breath was in her ear. “But when I get angry, when you push me to anger — or dare I say... Dominance...? That’s when you listen. That’s when you engage.”

Her heart continued to race with anxiety, only now, the reactions she was trying to push away came to a head. She swallowed the lump in her throat, scolding herself internally for the unwanted response to his Dominance. “Theo, please. Please...” She was lightly pushing his chest away. She turned her head turned away from him, her eyes shut. Her voice shook and her body trembled with a horrifying combination of desperate need and debilitating dread.

He banged his fists against the wall on either side of her, making her flinch, before pushing away and storming out of the dining room. Before she had a chance to slow her pounding heart, he stormed back, this time his expression desperate. She was still standing against the wall when he once again towered over her, so close she could feel his body heat pool off of him in waves. This time his touch was gentle, and he smoothed his hands up her arms.

His eyes were dark with intensity, his voice deep and grave with emotion. When he spoke, it was barely above a whisper. “For the love of God, Hermione, *please*! Please give us a fair chance.” It came out as an exhausted whisper as his forehead fell to hers, he closed his eyes. She couldn’t help herself when she leaned into him, her inner need to care for everyone taking over. ‘I hate doing what I’m doing. This is not who I am. I don’t want to be someone

who forces his wife to his will. I love you so much and I *know* you love me too.’ He pulled his forehead back from hers, once again looking in her eyes. She was surprised to see his shinning with unshed tears which made her own eyes prickle. “You’re mad at me. You feel betrayed, you feel deceived and you feel like I abandoned you. And... all those things are true. What I did was... unforgivable.”

This was more like it. Hermione needed the reminder of why she was angry with him. She needed to get away from his remorse and his pain, but he stayed close. His lips grazed her ear as he spoke, his face nuzzled her hair, deeply breathing her in. His voice dropped even lower, became even more seductive. She barely suppressed the shiver that threatened to run through her. “It was never because I didn’t want you. It was never because I didn’t desire you. You were and are *perfect*.” He gently kissed the top of her head and stepped back, leaving her feeling disoriented.

He moved away from her and towards the table, which helped Hermione clear her head better. His back was to her, his voice quiet. “It was because I wanted more, Hermione. I was lonely. I felt like you didn’t need me. When you became wrapped up in that case, I understood, and I was so proud of you! I just felt so... small. I felt like your world was so much bigger than me and that I was insignificant. I became insecure and she came along and stroked the ego in myself that was feeling deprived.”

Slowly getting her equilibrium back, she said, not unkindly. “Theo, this was all in your letter. You don’t need to...”

He turned back to her, effectively cutting her words off with a sad stare. “Yes, I do Hermione because you *still* don’t understand.” His voice was slightly aggressive, his tone a touch impatient and his eyes darkened once again.

Tentatively, she slowly walked over to him. Standing in front of him she looked up into his face. “Ok, Theo. Say what you have to say. Make me understand, because I just don’t. How could you do this to us? To me?” Her voice trembled slightly.

His blue eyes bore into hers, willing her to see his true and genuine love for her. He started his confession. “The first month or so, I’ll admit I was happy to have her fawning all over me. It wasn’t the sex that I liked, it was the attention. When I came to my senses, though, and I tried to break it off, she threatened to tell you. She had me under her thumb from that moment on. She blackmailed me, Hermione.”

He swallowed heavily, searching her eyes with his own, his expression solemn. “Which is why I hate myself for doing the same to you. It’s a scary position to be in.” He shook his head and laughed without humor. ‘Your fear is the release of photos; my fear was the loss of my wife. My dread was the loss of the one thing in my life that I knew I couldn’t live without.’ He tipped her chin up. “You.”

Hermione swallowed. Merlin help her, she believed him. She believed he had felt trapped and she believed that he loved her still, but it wasn’t enough. He dropped her chin and moved away from her, settling into a chair at the table. “Over time, it had become such a routine. She was mostly happy except for the random breakdown and occasional threat of suicide. I pushed you away because I despised myself. The love in your eyes made me hate myself every time I saw it reflected.” He continued despondently. “What I wouldn’t give to have you look at me like that again.”

There was silence. Hermione didn't know what to say, she seemed to be coming to terms with the fact that perhaps she didn't hate him after all. She did not see herself ever going back to him, though. She felt for him and understood what he had gone through, but how do you forgive what was done? How would she ever get past that? Could she love him again? Most likely. She still cared for him deeply, this was evident in how much his betrayal had devastated her. She would never be able to trust him again, though, and trust was everything in a marriage.

He stood and started to pace. "I wanted out, Hermione. I didn't want her. I don't think I ever wanted *her*. You were all I really wanted, but I was trapped. It was a trap of my own making, but a trap none the less."

He turned back to her. His hair was messy, his blue eyes passionate. "All I want is you, Hermione. All I want is to make it all up to you." His voice became soft, his gaze moved from her eyes to her mouth and back again. She saw his beautiful blues darken with lust, she watched his Adams apple as he swallowed. Desire was written all over his face, he continued. "Right now, all I want is to throw you over my shoulder and prove to you how good it can be, remind you of how good it used to be."

Hermione stared up at him, mulling over his heartfelt plea. Her body reacted to the changes in his face, but her mind frantically scrambled to control her libido. "Theo, I think... no. I understand how the affair started, and I wish you had come to me, talked to me. I would have given you what you needed. I would have explained that you were my world. I would have proven to you just how much I loved you." She shook her head, her shoulders rising as she took a deep, steadying breath. "But you didn't. You *chose* another woman. You chose to completely alter how you treated me. You chose to keep her happy and content over keeping me happy and content. She became the priority. Even if it was to keep her from telling me, she got *my* Theo, and I got the leftovers."

She watched his face fall with defeat. The quiet stretched a few moments before he answered her in a small, soft voice. "She never had me, Hermione," he said sadly. "I didn't even have me... I was lost."

Tuesday Morning

Hermione sat in the lobby of *Pucey and Associates*. She was not up on the comings and goings of wizarding world investments, but apparently Adrian Pucey was. His firm was clearly successful, judging by the lobby and the look of the place. It turns out that Adrian was a very successful money manager and financial advisor. The wizarding world didn't have its own stock market. There were publicly owned wizard businesses, but the shares were managed by the businesses themselves. It was nothing like the muggle world, but there were many in the magical community who wanted to invest in the muggle world. Adrian was the go to wizard for such investments. He had a very good understanding of muggle stocks, bonds, money markets as well as IRA's, CD's and real-estate investments. He had left Hogwarts and attended muggle universities to learn his craft.

Hermione had taken a gamble by just showing up at his office without an appointment. She had never met Adrian before as he was a few years older than her and had been a Slytherin. She hoped curiosity would get the better of him and he would agree to see her.

"Hermione?"

Hermione stood and stuck her hand out to shake the one offered. Adrian was tall and thin. His smile looked genuine and his soft brown eyes were kind. He had thick, dark hair which he wore very short. "Hermione Granger. Or wait, it's Hermione Nott, right? It's nice to officially meet you."

Hermione smiled back, genuinely. "It's nice to meet you as well. Thanks for seeing me."

"Well, come with me." He gestured towards his office and then walked beside her as he spoke. "I can only assume you would like some investment help or advice?"

They stepped into his office and he shut the door. He gestured towards a comfortable looking seat in front of his desk as he walked around the desk and took his own.

Hermione glanced around the office. Pictures of Daphne littered every surface and several of the two of them together occupied most of the wall space. He noticed her look around the room. "That's my Daphne. Did you know Daphne at Hogwarts? You must have. She was your year, right?"

Hermione nodded, indecision and guilt sweeping over her. The wizard not only had no clue, it was obvious he was very much in love with his wife. She did not want to hurt this man, she felt her smile turn brittle. "Umm, yeah. She was in my year. I didn't know her very well, though."

He smiled and after a silent pause asked. "So, what can I do for you?"

"Well... oh, this is hard," she breathed, barely loud enough for him to hear as she looked down at her hands that were twisting in her lap.

"What was that?" He asked, turning his ear towards her. "I didn't quite hear you." His friendly smile made this all that much harder.

Hermione let out a big breath as her eyes met his once again. "I'm afraid I'm not here in need of financial advice, Adrian. I'm here for two reasons. One, because I have something to tell you and I would hope you would have done the same for me." She paused, her voice softer as she continued. "And two, because I'm hoping you can help me."

Adrian leaned back in his chair, perplexed, watching her closely. His face was curious, but there was something else there as well. His intuition, or his inner Slytherin, sensed danger and that curious look was shadowed by a look of nervous caution.

Hermione kept her eyes on his, pushing aside all doubt that she was doing the right thing. He deserved the truth. "Adrian, my husband and your wife have been having an affair for five years. My understanding is it ended a couple weeks ago, but I can't really be sure of that." Relief at having gotten the words out caused her to let out a slow breath. She closed her eyes briefly and then opened them, internally preparing herself for his reaction, whatever it might be.

Adrian said nothing, his face turned to a stone mask as he listened.

When he didn't fly into a rage or burst into tears, she felt it was safe to continue. "I found out and left Theo. His mother is now blackmailing me with naked photos and forcing me to take him back. She's refusing to let a divorce tarnish the Nott reputation. The photos are graphic and were taken when Theo and I first married. They are of the two of us, but his face

has been doctored out of them. If I don't stay with him, make him happy, and produce an heir quickly, Ezmirelda Nott will release the photos."

He finally spoke. "Even if what you say is true, which I find very unlikely, why would I be interested in helping you and how would I do so?"

Hermione shook her head, her eyes pleading, her voice now trembling. "I'm desperate. I need help. I need something to threaten Theo with. Maybe pictures of the two of them together? Or a diary, a journal... anything to prove his infidelity so that I have something to bargain with. I want to divorce him and move on with my life."

He leaned forward, his eyes glittering with malice, his smile was an evil slash across his face. "Let me see if I have this straight. You come in to my office, tell me that my wife... my *faithful*, devoted, and loving wife... has been cheating on me with another wizard for... five-years, is it?"

"I'm so sorry to be the one..."

He interrupted her, his voice enraged, his face red. "And then you proceed to ask me to help you find evidence. Evidence that, if it were found, would hurt my wife? You want me to help you prevent photos that mean nothing to me from being released?" He shook his head and looked at her with undisguised disgust. "You have some nerve, Hermione Nott. I don't give a rat's ass about your problem. Too damn bad for you, I say. Don't you dare drag my *innocent* wife into your depraved delusions. Just because my wife and Theo were Hogwarts sweethearts is no reason to haul her name through the mud."

Her voice was calm. "Tell me Adrian, does your wife have a journal? Perhaps a series of journals that have matching covers? Journals that she writes in daily and has been writing in for five years?"

His face paled, his stony, determined expression faltering just a bit.

"They corresponded through matching journals. The ink disappears unless a secret password is spoken. When I read Theo's, the password was 'Master may I.' I only read a couple of Daphne's entries." She picked up her bag. "Theo destroyed his journals, or at least that's what he said. So, I'm not able to use them as leverage."

She stood, sighing heavily as she hoisted her purse over her shoulder. "Here is my card." She placed it on his desk. Her voice was soft and genuine. 'I'm so sorry to be the one to tell you. I was... devastated when I found out.' Her voice dropped, almost a whisper. "If you could be discreet, I would appreciate it." With that she turned and walked out of the office, leaving an angry, confused, and heartbroken wizard behind her.

Thursday

Hermione and Lizzy walked into the Ministry and met with Nelba at the elevator. They were still pinning on their Visitor badges when Nelba spoke. "You're the first case to present, Hermione."

Hermione smiled at the ministry witch, knowing she must have pulled in some favors to make that happen. "Thank you, Nelba. I really hope they are in a curious and receptive mood today."

Nelba eyed the box in Hermione's hand. "I see you brought a box of Luna's Delights, that certainly won't hurt."

Hermione smiled. "Luna had quite a selection at the shop this morning. I told her I needed pastries that would make listeners agreeable and suggestable." Hermione opened the box revealing colorful, huge cupcakes. "She said these were made with honeysuckle serum and crushed daisy root and that when eaten in small to moderate amounts, the individual feels a sense of calm, happiness, and an urge to please."

Lizzy laughed. "They sound perfect."

The witches stepped into the lift as soon as it appeared. "Wizengamot New Business Review Board, sub floor eight," Nelba spoke aloud.

The elevator dropped suddenly, and in a flash, it came to a screeching halt eight-floors underground. The doors flew open and ejected the witches out before closing and rapidly ascending back up to the main floor. Having ridden the express elevator multiple times before, the witches were prepared for the hasty ejection and landed on their feet. The first time Hermione had the pleasure of riding the horrid contraption, she had been gracelessly tossed on her behind six feet away from the lift.

The three witches made their way to the bench outside the review board office. The door would open at precisely nine and not a minute before. They reviewed their notes in the files.

When the door opened on its own, the three witches stood and entered the court room. There was a long table to the right and the review board sat on the opposite side. Hermione, Nelba and Lizzy crossed the room to stand on the other side.

"Names?" The no nonsense, middle-aged witch who was sitting in the most prominent center seat asked them without looking up.

"Hermione Nott, Nelba Bittington, and Lizzy Hockbottom. We have the first appointment." Nelba smiled politely as the middle-aged witch cocked an eyebrow.

"Indeed," the witch replied. Her hair was dark and her nose prominent. Hermione felt she bore a striking resemblance to Professor Snape, God rest his soul.

"Please be seated and state your concern."

This was it. The three witches sat down before Hermione used her wand to pass out the five prepared packets for the five members of the board. Hermione also placed the colorful, purple box on the center of the table. "Please help yourself to these cupcakes. They were given to me this morning and I really don't have a taste for sweets."

The middle-aged witch eyed the three of them knowingly. Hermione could now see her badge which read "Cornelia Crotch." *What an unfortunate name.*

Cornelia's sneer was hardly contained as she told them. "The review board will not be swayed by gifts of sweets. If that is your intention I'm afraid you've wasted your galleons."

Hermione smiled angelically. "Oh, no! Of course not. How unthoughtful of me!" She reached for the box. "I'll just drop them off at the Auror Department on our way out. So sorry!"

As she started to pull the box back, Cornelia's spidery, cold fingers grasped the box from the other side. "Well, seeing as you meant no harm or undue influence, perhaps this once..."

Hermione released the box. "I certainly didn't, I wasn't thinking. Please, do with them what you will."

As the five witches and wizards on the opposite side of the table passed the box around, selecting their pick of the cupcakes. Lizzy leaned into Hermione and whispered. "How very Slytherin of you, Hermione."

One hour later, Cornelia Crotch was smiling at Hermione. The three elderly wizards and young, bespeckled witch who comprised the rest of the board had matching smiles as well. "Mrs. Nott, we feel confident this cause will interest the Wizengamot a great deal. And, furthermore, my colleagues and I feel further evidence is warranted and we are justified in subpoenaing the employee files from Malfoy Enterprises as you so astutely suggested. An owl will be dispatched shortly with the subpoena. Copies will be ordered to be delivered to your office no later than five tomorrow evening. Will that suffice?"

Hermione smiled warmly. "That would be splendid and so helpful. Thank you very much for your diligent and fair examination of the testimonies, and for supporting this worthy cause to fight long standing discrimination."

Cornelia smiled as she took another small nibble from her second cupcake. "Well, it will be up to the Wizengamot to determine if a change in labor laws is necessary, but you certainly make a compelling argument. Good luck to you Mrs. Nott, Mrs. Bittington, and Mrs. Hockbottom."

"Good day to you all," Hermione replied as they gathered up their files.

The three witches cracked open a bottle of champagne when they got back to Hermione's office. "To Moxie!" Hermione chirped.

"To equal rights!" Nelba added.

"To you two, and to Champagne at eleven on a Thursday morning!" Lizzy finished, laughing.

They all toasted and Hermione wrapped an arm around Lizzy, tapping her glass once again. "To you, my dear friend Lizzy. What would I ever do without you?" The three laughed and drank champagne, basking in the success of the first big step and conquest of their endeavor. Hermione was absolutely thrilled the needed files would be subpoenaed. Her problem of obtaining the files legally was handled. She would destroy the files Rita had obtained.

After finishing the bottle, Nelba left, stating she was taking the rest of the day off to spend working in her garden. Hermione and Lizzy wished her a great day and then contemplated how to spend the rest of theirs.

Hermione was giddy. She was genuinely happy. The first time she had been properly happy in almost two weeks. She felt buzzed and alive and she didn't want it to end. "Lizzy, let's go out and have a few more drinks."

It warmed Lizzy's heart to see Hermione so happy. "Ok. It's lunch time, though. Most places will be crowded."

"I know the perfect place. We'll go to the Wayward Broom. It might be crowded but it has a huge bar."

The two witches apparated and stepped into the hustling establishment. They were fortunate to find two seats next to each other at the end of the bar. They ordered champagne cocktails and toasted to their success.

Two drinks and an hour later, Hermione was feeling quite buzzed. She knew she was getting drunk and knew she should stop, but she was so happy to have something in her life go right for a change.

"Hermione, I think I've had too much to drink. I need to go." Lizzy confessed, her words slightly slurred.

Hermione looked at Lizzy and smiled. "Are you okay to get home?"

Lizzy shrugged, dismissively. "I'm going to walk. It's only about six blocks to my home. The walk will help sober me up."

Hermione hugged her, her words slightly slurred as well. "Thank you, Lizzy. See you tomorrow."

Lizzy smiled. "Hermione, how about you head home as well. We can owl my Albert. He'll side along Apparate us both. I don't want you Apparating when you've been drinking, and your flat is too far to walk."

"Lizzy, I'm fine. I promise. Go home. I'll see you tomorrow," Hermione reassured the older woman.

Lizzy contemplated for a minute before hugging her once more. "Alright, but please be careful." Her motherly, concerned tone warmed Hermione's heart.

Not wanting to go back to the flat yet and not ready to end the celebration, Hermione ordered another champagne cocktail and slowly sipped it. She looked at the wall clock. It was just after two-thirty in the afternoon. She glanced around the restaurant/bar and noticed it was fairly empty. As she sipped her drink, the bell over the door jingled, signaling another patron entering the bar. She turned and spotted a flash of white blond hair. She closed and reopened her blurry eyes. Draco... with Astoria. Beautiful Astoria with her gorgeous blonde hair, blue eyes, and expensive robes. Draco's hand was on her back guiding her through the maze of tables. Hermione felt jealousy rip through her in a heated rage so fierce that it stole her breath. She was drunk enough to be irrational, but still sober enough to realize she was being unreasonable. Draco had told Hermione he was still close to his ex-wife, but it didn't make the sting any less potent. She tried to be nonchalant as she watched him assist Astoria in slipping off her outer robes, revealing her slender yet busty, perfect figure in a striking lavender silk dress.

She watched as they sat down across from each other, Draco was smiling and laughing as they talked. Hermione felt sick. For the first time, she felt completely drunk. She needed to leave, she couldn't watch them. It would drive her barmy. She tossed the required galleons on the bar and slipped off her stool, accidentally dropping her bag, which made a lot of noise.

Fuck! She didn't want Draco or Astoria to notice her. She grabbed her bag and made a dash for the door, tripping over her outer robes that were draped over her arm. She stumbled to the door and barely made it outside before a hand grabbed her, turning her back into the surprised face of Draco Malfoy.

"Granger, what the hell! Are you wasted?" His concerned grey eyes on her and there was disapproval in his voice, his strong hand held her steady.

She laughed. "Ten points to Slytherin!" She exclaimed, throwing her arm in the air and bursting into a fit of laughter.

"Hermione, what the hell?" He looked left and then right, concern etched on his face. "I need to get you home." He looked back towards the bar.

She pulled her arm away. "Malfoy, I'm fine. Go back to your *wife*." Her words were slurred and she was rocking back and forth on her feet. She winced to herself, she could hear the jealousy in her voice.

Draco's forehead wrinkled. "Ex-wife. You're right, I shouldn't leave her, but I need to get you home. You're in no condition to Apparate."

"You don't need to do anything. I can take care of myself." Hermione couldn't help it, she hated that he was there with Astoria. Jealousy of the younger witch, desire for him, the elation of winning her deposition, her confusion over her reactions to Theo's pleading and Dominance... it was too much. She needed to leave, post-haste. "Good bye, Draco," she mumbled as she turned on the spot.

"Hermione, wait!" It was too late, she was gone. He stood there for a minute, at a loss as to what she was doing so drunk, in a bar, all alone in the middle of the afternoon. To top it off he was worried she didn't make it home. He needed to know she was safe. He turned and stormed back into the bar.

Hermione landed safely on the sidewalk outside Theo's flat. In hindsight, she should have gone to her own apartment, but she knew Draco wouldn't look for her here. More importantly, she wouldn't know if he didn't come looking for her. Ignorance could be bliss after all. In her drunken and irrational mind, she couldn't help but wonder if Draco was still sleeping with Astoria. He said he wasn't, but she knew from experience that wizards weren't to be trusted.

She stumbled her way into the apartment and to the kitchen. She pulled the bottle of wine out of the fridge and poured a glass. She tossed her robes and her bag on the counter and was about to take a blessed sip when a strong hand wrapped around her wrist.

"I think you've had enough, Kitten."

She jumped in surprise and turned. Intense but concerned blue eyes were on her. His grip holding her steady. She swayed and started to pull away. "Let me go, Theo." She demanded. "I'm celebrating."

"I don't think so, Kitten. Put the glass down, you've had enough." His eyes were dark, his stance tall and towering, his Dominance present and accounted for.

Theo had been at work when the PI showed up unexpectedly, warning Theo that Hermione was drunk and he might want to check on her. He was shocked to find she was much more intoxicated than he had anticipated. She was not a big drinker. Knowing she shouldn't drink anymore, he took control of the situation.

Hermione swallowed as she looked up into his intense expression, his sexy dark eyes glittered with... amusement? He was beautiful, she had to admit. And Merlin, when he looked at her like that. She had once loved him, hadn't she? Her eyes were heavy lidded. She swallowed as she felt warmth creep over her. Unchecked and unwanted desire overtaking her, she'd always been an amorous drunk.

Theo's eyes flashed, he knew those signs. She was aroused. "Kitten, put down the glass. Now." It was a command, his voice deep and seductive. He knew what she craved. He'd been too blind to take her seriously all those weeks ago. He was quite sure it was how Draco had seduced her. He would do the same. He carefully placed one hand on the counter on each side of her and stepped as close as he could without touching her, seductively cornering her, caging her in his arms. His eyes moved from her eyes, to her mouth to the dress that hugged her tits just the right way.

She slowly put the glass down, her eyes boring into his. Misjudging her placement, it crashed to the floor, shattering. He ignored it, his focus completely on her, he let his eyes smolder with heat. *Finally!* he thought to himself as her soft brown eyes flickered with desire. He scooped her up by her bum and was pleased when she wrapped her arms and legs around him before he carried her to the bedroom. His heart pounding with need and excitement.

He set her down, watching her while warring with himself. She was drunk, he shouldn't take advantage. She wasn't completely snookered, but pretty close. He could tell that she wanted him, and Merlin knows he wanted her.

Hermione felt fuzzy, warm, and aroused. In the back of her mind, she knew she was with the wrong wizard. She knew it was stupid to let it go this far, and yet she didn't know why she should fight it. It felt wrong, but oh, so right at the same time. Her thoughts flashed to Draco, the way his hand was placed possessively on Astoria's back, how his fingers had trailed down her slender shoulders as he slid off her outer robes. Jealously spurned her desire and need.

She forced herself to focus on the wizard in front of her. The dark, sexy, tall wizard. Her husband. Because for all that had happened, he was still her husband. She took a breath, trying to clear her fuzzy head.

Theo had her pressed against the bed. He whispered seductively, his mouth right next to her ear. She shivered. "Kitten, I know what you want... what you need." He leaned forward and nuzzled her neck, planting a soft kiss at her pulse point before trailing an open mouth along the tendons of her neck. His right hand slid around the back of her head and his left wrapped around to her lower back. He pulled her to him, pressing his hard body against her soft curves.

"You've been a bad witch, Kitten. A very, very bad witch." His eyes were dark, his tone still seductive, his delicious words a hint of what was to come, a hint of what she was craving.

Hermione's eyes remained locked on his beautiful, dark blue orbs that were heated with demands and desires. She had forgotten how incredibly sexy his Dominant eyes were when they were so close. She wanted him. She wanted her husband. She shouldn't feel guilty. She said she would try, after all. Her eyes fell to his mouth.

Recognizing her silent invitation, his mouth crashed on hers. His kiss was urgent, encompassing. Desperate to touch her, he ripped the front of her dress, exposing her breasts, encased in a lacy, black bra.

Needing to maintain some semblance of his control, control he knew she needed him to wield, he stepped back and crossed his arms. "Take off your bra."

Hermione reached behind her, clumsily unclasping it, allowing it to slide down her arms before pushing it aside to drift to the floor. Theo's eyes feasted on her beautiful, familiar tits, her nipples peaked with arousal. His eyes then moved back to hers. His voice was husky with his own arousal. "Take off your skirt, leave on your heels."

Hermione was starting to feel overly relaxed, almost sleepy, but she was also soaking wet and turned on. The skirt fell to the floor and then his hands were on her bum and his mouth closed over one taut, straining nipple. He picked her up and laid her back in the bed as he unbuckled his belt and slid off his trousers. "Lay back, Kitten. Spread yourself open for me."

She melted back into the soft mattress, watching him with hooded eyes. A voice in the back of her brain was yelling muffled cries, begging her to stop this. But she didn't want to stop, her body needed this. She just needed to relax and be taken care of.

Theo was panting with lust as his eyes roved her splayed naked form. His hands around her waist, he slid her back to the edge of the bed. His fingers caressed past her hips, ripping off her flimsy knickers. His strong grip pulled her a touch closer and then grasped her slender thighs, spreading them wide. Her bottom was teetering on the edge of the bed, rubbing against his erection as he stood in front of her. His hands held her in place as she began to writhe with need.

"Hmm, perhaps I should punish you before I fuck you." His seductive gaze scorched her as it roved her body. He leaned down, trailing his hot, wet tongue from her navel to the underside of one breast, nuzzling it with his nose and making her mewl and throw her head back with delight. "Hmm? What do you think, Kitten?" His mouth made its way further north to tease a nipple and she arched into him, needy noises erupting from her throat.

"Just fuck me, please. Oh, Gods, please! Fuck me!" Her words were mumbled, her eyes closed. Her hands in his hair, holding him in place.

"As you wish, Kitten. I'll never deny you, ever again." He straightened up, lifting her ankles over his shoulders, her black heels still on her delicate feet. As he slid into her welcoming, wet heat, his eyes closed. He stilled, reveling in the feel of her. It had been far too long, and it felt like coming home. After pausing for a couple of seconds to collect himself, he began to move. He opened his eyes and watched her face, her brow was crinkled with the combination of painful pleasure this act caused, her mouth slightly open. More soft sex noises spilled from her lips. "Open your eyes, Kitten." He wanted to see her.

Hermione was falling, drifting into a blissful state of ignorant peace as pleasurable friction slid in and out of her. It felt like a dream. A wonderful dream. Visions of grey eyes, blond

hair... Draco always knew just what to do to make her feel amazing. She could feel him filling her again and again, his hands massaging her breasts, plucking at her nipples. She whimpered, soft pleas dropping from her lips as she neared her climax. There was a delicious pressure on her clit, and a deep voice. A voice that seemed wrong somehow, whispering for her to open her eyes. Her brow crinkled in confusion. She didn't want to open her eyes. She worried if she did, this beautiful dream would end and she had missed him so much. She didn't want it to end.

"I said open your eyes!" The voice became louder, more demanding. She was so lethargic. Her eyes opened lazily as a strong hand yanked her hair. *Yes, a little roughness is always good.* 'Hmm,' she moaned, giving a little smirk. Then, a touch of confusion; a touch of uncertainty as blue eyes filled her retinas instead of grey. The eyes were familiar and dark with lust as she felt him snap his hips a little harder, a little faster. "Oh... Theo," she whispered in surprise, her eyes widening. "No, Theo. No," she whispered, bringing up heavy arms in attempts to push him away. His were the wrong eyes. She wanted grey.

Theo watched as her clouded eyes took him in. He groaned when she played at pushing him away. Her whispers of no driving him crazy, pushing himself faster and harder. It was a game they used to play. Saying "no" as he fucked her, taking her seemingly against her will. If she really wanted him to stop, he knew she would safe word. But she had never safe worded before and he was confident she was enjoying this as much as he was. As the word 'no', and not the safe word 'quidditch', continued to spill from her sexy mouth, he was spurred on. He picked up his pace again, not willing to disappoint. His climax was fast approaching, he rubbed his fingers on her clit as his rhythm became frantic. He watched as her eyes rolled back with ecstasy. The word 'no' still spilling occasionally from her lips as she arched her back into him, her pebble peaked tits calling out to him. He leaned forward again, lightly biting a nipple as she tensed and moaned loudly with her release.

His own climax was close as her walls clamped, milking him, welcoming him home. He collapsed over her, kissing her neck, smiling with the realization that she was his again. Emotion pushed him over the edge. He tensed with his climax, his seed spilling into her as he barely heard her whisper, "Draco."

He froze, not wanting to believe it. He must have misheard. As his post climax heart rate and breathing slowed, he lifted himself up, looking down into her flushed face. Her eyes were closed and her mouth moist. He let out a slow breath, convincing himself he had not heard what he thought he did. But, his world collapsed once again as her mouth turned up into a soft smile. Devastating words spilled from her lips. "Hmm, Draco. I love you."

Chapter 25

Thursday Afternoon Continued

Theo pushed back from Hermione to stand, looking down at her splayed, naked form. Her eyes were closed, a soft snore now falling from her lips. Tendrils of hair were gently moving back and forth with each breath. Her arms were collapsed at awkward angles by her side, and her legs were off the bed. Realizing that if he stepped away from her she would likely slide to the floor, he leaned forward to grasp under her arms and push her up farther onto the bed... perhaps not as gently as he should have.

He swallowed heavily as he looked down at her passed-out form. Multiple emotions coursed through him — confusion, anger, disappointment, heartbreak, as well as self-hatred for having taken her in such a drunken state. He ran his hands through his hair. *Fuck!* He had known she was drunk, but he hadn't realized she was to the point of passing out on him. He picked up the folded quilt at the foot of the bed and tossed it over her.

He watched her a minute longer and then turned away storming into the bathroom, suddenly feeling a little sick. A voice in his head reprimanded him. *You knew she was drunk! You took advantage!* He splashed his face with cool water as another voice took over. *She wanted it as much as you did. It's her fault as well. She got off on it, didn't she? She didn't safe word, she didn't stop you!*

He straightened up, looking at himself in the mirror. She did say no, though, multiple times. But if she didn't want it, why didn't she safe word? And why the hell did she say Draco's name? He shook his head in frustration. He knew the answer. In her drunken state, she thought he was Draco. At least in the end she did. In the beginning, she had definitely known who she was with. Of that much he was sure.

He stood over the toilet, emptying his bladder, trying to come to terms with what had just happened. Anger became his overwhelming emotion; anger at Draco, anger at her, and anger at himself.

He stalked into the kitchen and grabbed a beer before sitting at the kitchen table, contemplating how his life had gone tits up.

Hours later, the bedroom was dark when Hermione began to stir. She was freezing, her body shivering with the cold. Her head hurt and her mouth tasted horrible as her heavy eyelids slowly tried to open. As the room around her slowly came into focus she was confused. What time was it? She looked at the hands on her bedside clock. The little hand was on the ten and the large hand was on forty-one. *Ten forty-one? What?* She ran her hands through her hair as it all came flooding back. Dread and nausea overcame her as she shot out of bed, half tripping and half stumbling as she scrambled to the bathroom where she vomited spectacularly all over the tile floor, just missing the toilet.

Two more steps and she was at the blessed bowl. She lifted the lid as the second wave of abdominal contractions forced more bile and liquid to come out of her mouth. She fell to her

knees and rested her head on the cool rim of the bowl, trying to regain control, trying to stabilize her breathing, and willing herself not to get sick again. She closed her eyes, exhausted, wanting to forget. *Oh God, I slept with Theo!* Her diaphragm contracted once again, this time producing nothing. Dry heaves had her stomach muscles tensing and contracting. Her head was starting to pound.

After what seemed like forever, the gagging heaves stopped and she was able to stand. She stepped to the sink, rinsing her mouth before brushing her teeth. In the cabinet over the sink was a headache potion which she swallowed desperately. She stood quietly for a minute, letting the potion take effect. As the headache receded, her memory came back with more clarity. She opened her eyes, taking in her reflection. She looked pale. A bit green, actually. She was naked. The last thing she remembered was Theo's blue eyes towering over her as he fucked her.

She walked to the bed and spotted her wand on the floor, mixed up with her clothes. She picked it up and went back to the bathroom where she cleaned her mess before putting on her robe and heading into the rest of the apartment. She stared at the bed for a minute, wondering where Theo was and then decided it would be nice if he wasn't home. She didn't know if she could face him right now.

She went to the kitchen to make tea, relieved to find he wasn't anywhere to be found. She sat at the kitchen table, sipping the blessed tea, willing herself to feel better. Not really caring, but curious all the same, she wondered where Theo was. It was then that she saw the evening edition of *The Daily Prophet* laying in front of her. The headline caused her to drop her cup.

Socialite, Daphne Pucey, Dead at 28

Ministry officials recovered the body of a 28-year-old female, later identified as Daphne Pucey, from Diagon Park early this afternoon. Cause of death appears to be suicide, according to Ministry Officials. However, the method is being withheld pending further investigation. Officials were called to the scene when a group of teenagers were playing quidditch at Diagon Park and noticed the body. They immediately notified the Ministry.

Daphne was the wife of financial advisor and consultant, Adrian Pucey, of Pucey and Associates. He was unable to be reached for comment. She is survived by her sister Astoria, 25 and her parents Frockton and Marigold Greengrass, both 52. She is formerly the daughter-in-law to Lucius and Narcissa Malfoy and was sister-in-law to Draco Malfoy, formerly married to Astoria.

More to come as details become available.

A heavy wave of guilt overcame Hermione. She had caused this, she was sure of it. She never should have gone to Adrian. She never should have told him. Just because her life was ruined, she didn't need to destroy his. She had known that Daphne was mentally unstable.

She could picture the turn of events perfectly. She had gone to Adrian, Adrian had confronted his wife, and she had been driven to suicide. Hermione didn't even know this witch and knew her feelings were irrational, but she felt tremendous sadness over the death. She thought of Adrian and she thought of Theo. *Poor Theo.* He had loved this woman and he was somewhere hurting and probably feeling guilty as well.

Despite the potion, Hermione's head still hurt. She stood up and waved her wand over the spilled tea, cleaning it instantly.

Her eyes shot up when she heard the front door open and a haggard Theo stepping in. Hermione rushed over to him and wrapped her arms around him. He stood still, not responding and then rested his head on top of hers, slowly bringing his hands around her.

His voice was scratchy and raw. "I'm sorry, Hermione. I'm sorry about earlier. You were too drunk, and I shouldn't have... and then I was in the living room berating myself for taking advantage when the paper came. And... and... oh, God!" A sob escaped him, and he shook with silent tears.

After a minute, she spoke. "Come, sit on the sofa with me." She took his hand and led him to the couch. He collapsed into it, his head falling into his hands. She sat down next to him, tentatively rubbing his back. She spoke quietly, realizing she wasn't angry. "What happened between us was... it was... well it happened. And I am to blame as well. I'm not angry with you. Let's just try to forget about it... at least for now."

He didn't say anything but took one her hands into his and held it. She rested her head on his shoulder. "I'm sorry about Daphne, Theo. I know you loved her. I know you were afraid she would do something like this. But you must *not* blame yourself."

He didn't respond. After a minute he turned to her. "I went to her house. I didn't know what to say, but I went anyway. Adrian, he... he was devastated. He was in a back room, not receiving visitors. Astoria, Draco, Narcissa and Daphne's parents were there." He shook his head and then turned to Hermione. "Draco wanted to know you were ok. I told him you made it home and were sleeping. He said he was going to check on you, but the news of Daphne came right after you left the bar."

A confused, contemplative look came over his face. "I know I should be angry that he asked about you, and if I was in a normal frame of mind I would have been." He paused, 'but death, it kind of...changes how you look at things, you know?' He let out a slow breath. "I just don't have the energy to be jealous or angry with him."

Hermione squeezed his hand. "You and Draco have been friends a very long time, Theo. Despite everything, underneath it all, you still love each other."

He shrugged. "Maybe. I don't know."

Friday Morning

Hermione arrived at work, exhausted. She hadn't slept well. Her own misery, in combination with Theo's constant tossing and turning all night, had prevented her from getting barely a wink of sleep. She wasn't surprised to see Lizzy looking worse for wear. Hermione smiled at her knowingly. "Go home, Lizzy. You've yet to take a sick day and you don't need to be here today. I'll handle the office."

Lizzy shook her head. "No, I'm here if you're here."

Hermione walked over to her. "Lizzy, go home. It's not a request. I've got this. Get some rest and come back fresh on Monday."

Lizzy stood, hesitantly. "Ok, Hermione. Only if you insist, though."

Hermione nodded. “Yes, I insist.” The older witch smiled at Hermione and then picked up her purse before leaving the office.

Hermione made a pot of tea and headed to her desk. She poured her cup and sat back in her chair. Theo was home today, having taken a sick day. Tired of thinking about her personal life, she focused on work. She wrote an owl to Moxie, telling her about the successful review board encounter and put it in the owl outbox. Then she started thinking about the subpoenaed employee files that were due for delivery by five o’clock and couldn’t help but to wonder if Draco knew about that yet. And, if he did, how angry was he.

She didn’t have to wait long. An irate, fuming wizard with white-blond hair stormed into her office less than an hour later. Face contorted with anger and frustration, he threw a stack of files on her desk. “What the fuck, Hermione!”

She leaned back in her chair to look at him. Then her prepared defense spilled out of her mouth without a conscious thought. “Draco, Malfoy Enterprises is not the subject in this case. Discrimination against magical beings and unfair hiring practices is the premise. You have broken no laws and will not be in any trouble with the Wizengamot.”

Draco spoke with a low voice through clenched teeth. “Why the hell are my files being subpoenaed then?” His hands were on his hips, his face red.

Hermione kept her voice calm, hoping it would help to calm him as well. “Because, according to interviews we have conducted, we believe discrimination has occurred against these individuals and your files might prove that. If the files show it, I’m hoping the Wizengamot will pass legislation that will change future hiring practices, not just at ME, but all wizarding businesses in England.”

Still angry, he fired back. “Why the hell can’t you use another firm or business as your sacrificial lamb. Why *my* company?!”

Hermione laughed, standing. “I hardly think Malfoy Enterprises is a defenseless lamb, Draco.”

He stepped closer, his voice low, his threat clear. “You realize I’m going to have to come against your proposed legislation to keep ME from looking bad. I will not have ME made an example of bad hiring practices!”

Hermione stepped closer to him. They were right in each other’s faces. She spoke with the same low voice as his in a non-yielding tone. She would not back down. “Bring it on, Draco. But it’s going to be worse for you if you fight it. If you were smart you would claim that my investigation has brought an issue to your awareness, and that you now agree it needs further attention. You could say you regret any discrimination that may have occurred in your hiring department and, even though it was legal, you feel it was ethically wrong and you intend to put a stop to it at ME *regardless* of the Wizengamot’s decision. Negative press turns into positive press with one... simple... statement!” She poked his chest in synch with her last three words.

He didn’t respond and neither of them moved. Their eyes battled for dominance. Anger, fury, and heat radiated from him like steam shooting out of a tea kettle. His eyes went to her lips and he swallowed. “God, you’re sexy when you get fired up.” He crushed his mouth to hers.

Her hand immediately went to the back of his head and she held him close as she kissed him back like her life depended on it. The kiss slowed and she pulled away slightly. "I've missed you so much, Draco. I... I—" His mouth was on hers again, his tongue demanding entry, his hand sliding up her leg, under her skirt. Her heart started racing and heat pooled in her core even as her hand slammed on his. "We can't, Draco. If Theo finds out..."

Breathing heavily, his mouth now on her neck. "I told you, forget about those damn photos, leave him, just be *mine*."

She shook her head, pulling away from him. "I can't, Draco." She felt guilt come over her. She had slept with Theo and Draco didn't know. Draco didn't know about Ezmirelda's last visit either. "Listen, about yesterday,"

He interrupted her. "Yeah, what had you so upset you were drinking alone? Theo, the pictures... his mother... they aren't worth this misery. We can get through it together. I love you!"

She swallowed. "Oh, Draco... there's, well there's stuff I haven't told you."

He stepped back, studying her face. With a concerned look in his eye, he asked, "What? What do you mean?"

She sucked her bottom lip into her mouth, slightly chickening out and going with the easiest disclosure first. "I uh, I went to see Adrian Pucey on Tuesday." Her voice shook. "I told him about Daphne and Theo. He didn't believe me at first, but I think he did by the time I left. He was so angry. I... I told him about the photos and asked for his help."

Draco collapsed into the chair in front of her desk. "Wow. Well, that helps explain things."

Hermione started to tremble. "It's my fault. It's my fault she killed herself." She wrapped her arms around herself. "Adrian must have confronted her. That must have been why she..."

Draco shook his head. "No, Pet. That's not what happened." He stood up, meeting her eyes and taking one of her hands in his. "Adrian hadn't seen Daphne in days. She told him she was going on holiday with a friend last weekend and told him she would be back in a few days. She never came home. He had been calling around, looking for her. It turns out she didn't go on holiday after all. Her friend knew nothing of her whereabouts."

He paused. "Last night, after Theo left the Pucey's home, Adrian came into the part of the house where we had gathered and said that Theo was never to be allowed in his house again. Astoria and I thought perhaps he had figured it out, but now I know... you told him."

Hermione exhaled, unrelenting relief coursing through her as she sat in her chair. Daphne hadn't killed herself as a result of her telling Adrian. But, poor Adrian. "I told him for nothing, then. I broke his heart. If I hadn't told him, her death would be tragic and he would be heartbroken, but he would believe she had been faithful. Now, he'll never know what happened or why she did it."

Draco watched her and then pulled her into his arms, rubbing her back, trying to reassure her. "If it were me, if I were Adrian, I would still want to know. Your intentions weren't malicious, Hermione. You didn't tell him with the goal of hurting him. You did the right thing."

He lifted his wrist up from behind her back, looking at his watch. Sighing, he whispered with regret. "I need to go. I have a meeting."

He pulled away and watched her for a minute, a smirk on his handsome face. "I'm still mad, you know." His eyes raked her up and down before landing on the folder he just dropped off. "I might punish you for this," he teased.

She smiled, teasing him back. "No, no. Remember, no punishing for work related issues."

"Hmm, I don't think I like that rule." A playful grin was on his face.

The grin melted as he closed his eyes, taking a breath before opening them again with a pleading look. "Please reconsider, Hermione. Just leave him."

She shook her head. "You know I can't. Go to your meeting. I'll see you... at some point."

He rubbed his eyes, and when he pulled his hands away, his face was no longer anguished, but resigned. He huffed and left her office without another word.

She watched his retreating form then walked into the bathroom, looking at her reflection in the mirror. Her fingers went to her lips, still red from the kiss they had shared. She looked herself in the eyes, whispering as she scolded herself. "You didn't tell him about yesterday. Deception by omission is still deception, Hermione."

She stepped away from the mirror and walked back to her desk. *You'll tell him. At some point.*

When Hermione got home from work, Theo was sitting on the sofa in the living room, reading. She sat in the chair next to the fireplace, turning towards him. Her voice factual, not emotional, she disclosed Draco's visit in a business-like fashion. "You should know that Draco came to see me this morning. He brought files the review board subpoenaed. He was angry, and we fought about the case. We then talked about Daphne and Adrian. I told him something that I need to tell you."

Theo had put his book down and was listening to her but wasn't looking at her. She continued, her voice a little softer. "I went to see Adrian on Tuesday, I told him about you and Daphne. I told him about the blackmail and asked him to help me gather evidence. Evidence to use against you, or more importantly, your mother. Evidence of your affair or information that would free me from the hold you have over me." She shifted in her seat. 'He became angry and accused me of lying. He didn't believe me, at least that's what he said. His eyes showed pain, though. I think he was just in denial.' She paused, waiting for his ire, but it never came. "Draco said Adrian had not talked to Daphne since the weekend, so she didn't know that he knew."

She looked down at her hands in her lap, her tone more personal. "I wish I hadn't gone to him, but I was desperate." She paused. 'Your mother, she... she visited me on Monday. Told me I had to start *sleeping* with you. Told me I needed to give you an heir. If I didn't, she would release the photos.' Theo looked up at her, shock on his face. She met his eyes and continued. "So, I was *desperate* for help and I foolishly went to Adrian. I thought maybe he would help me, but I was wrong. All I accomplished was breaking his heart."

She stood up. "I just... wanted you to know." She left him to absorb all she said and walked into the bedroom to change.

She had slipped off her dress and was standing in her bra and panties when she felt his eyes on her. She turned to see he was leaning against the door frame, his arms crossed, watching her. His voice was quiet, his eyes dull. "I won't force you to have sex with me, Hermione. I guess the reason you didn't tell me, before now, about her visit was because you thought I might."

She pulled her t-shirt and sweatpants on, not saying anything.

"Is that why you got so drunk? You couldn't bear the thought of sleeping with me, but felt you had to? You got drunk in order to do it?" His voice was defeated. He was looking at the floor, his shoulders slumped.

Hermione shook her head. For all his faults, he didn't own this one. "No, Theo. I got drunk for a combination of many reasons. My case before the review board, mainly. And perhaps wanting to forget your mother's threat and my predicament. But it wasn't for the purpose of coming home to bed you. That was never part of it."

He walked over to the bed and collapsed back onto it. "I'm so tired, Hermione. Tired of all this. I just wish you loved me like you used to. It would be so good."

Her voice was soft, but without anger. Just simple resignation to the truth. "Believe me, my life would be so much easier if that were the case. I just don't think I'll ever feel that way about you again, Theo. It's too late, and this blackmail thing... I'll never forgive you for it." She walked out of the room

Chapter 26

Friday Evening Continued....

Clarity of thought washed over Hermione as she walked out her bedroom and away from Theo. She would never trust him again and she would likely never forgive him for blackmailing her. How could she? How do you come back from *that*?! She stepped into the kitchen and filled the kettle with water and placed it on the stove top. Beauty rubbed up against her legs as she stood looking out the window over the kitchen sink, her mind still on what had just transpired. She had told Theo the truth. He now knew about Ezmirelda's latest threat and he knew she had gone to Adrian. It felt good to have it all out on the table, so to speak.

Her shoulders slumped and she let out small breath of frustration. If only she could be so forthcoming with Draco. He was not going to be pleased she hadn't told him about Ezmirelda's visit sooner. And, he would likely blow a gasket that she had slept with Theo. *Of all the stupid things, Hermione!* She never should have gotten so drunk and gone home in such a state. *Regardless, you need to tell Draco.* As hard as it would be, she knew she would feel better when she came clean.

She was tired of thinking about it. She knew there was only one way to put her worried mind at ease. She turned toward the stove, willing the water to heat faster. *Just be honest. You were drunk... and jealous... and reckless... and stupid!* She closed her eyes. She needed to tell Draco the truth and she needed to do it soon. This weekend, if possible. Tonight, would be even better. *Tonight... it would be so good to see him tonight!*

She couldn't ignore the fact that she missed him terribly. His visit this morning... his anger... and then that kiss. *Merlin, that kiss!* It had taken every ounce of her control not to let him have his way with her... right there, on the desk... as they had done before. Just last Tuesday. Had it really only been last Tuesday that happened? It had just been last Wednesday that they had spent that amazing afternoon at The Ritz. Nine days since they had been together. God, it felt so much longer. It felt like forever, and she was burning to see him. She could picture him... she could actually *feel* him. His strong, protective arms around her, his breath on her ear, his voice whispering delicious promises, commands and words of love, his body molded close to hers. She was getting warm. *Maybe you should make iced tea instead,* she mused.

The water finally hot, she made her cup of tea and sat down to drink it. Theo had not come out of the bedroom. She looked towards the hall. Maybe he was sleeping. She knew he didn't rest well the night before. She shook her head in sadness as she thought about Daphne and Adrian. That was another source of guilt. She wished she had never told Adrian. *Well, you are just full of regrets, aren't you?* She spoke out loud, quietly and to herself. "Hermione, you need to purge these demons."

In order to do that, she needed to get to Draco. She had crosses to bear. *Hmm. A St. Andrews Cross would do nicely.* She smiled to herself. Perhaps Draco would understand. Perhaps a punishment... a spanking? She shivered with need and arousal at the thought. She

chewed her lip as she pondered how the blond wizard would react when she confessed. Somehow, she doubted erotic spankings would be on the menu. A voice deep within herself craved a true punishment. A true punishment so that she could really put it behind her. But, what was a true punishment? She wasn't quite sure. What would it take for him to forgive her... for her to forgive herself? It was so ironic. Here she was feeling guilty for cheating on Draco with her husband. *Your life is truly a mess, Hermione.*

Before she could do anything, she needed a way to get to Draco. A way in which her PI follower wouldn't be able to tail her. Or, maybe he wouldn't know she had left? A thought came to mind. A thought she dreaded but would probably work. She tiptoed back to the bathroom and opened the cabinet, happy to find it was still there. She wondered to herself. *Does polyjuice expire?* It had been in the cabinet for about six years. Back when they had been at each other like rabbits and were really experimenting sexually, she and Theo had contemplated changing into each other and having sex. But ultimately, they had decided it would be too creepy. So, the polyjuice had been sitting in the cabinet untouched all these years.

She tentatively took the potion out of the cabinet and once again tiptoed into the bedroom. Theo was sound asleep, just as she had expected. She tossed a quilt over him and quietly grabbed a set of his clothing. She then plucked a hair out of his comb. She decided that once she made the change, she would walk out the front door of the apartment as though she were him. The PI tailing her would assume she was still inside and would ignore Theo, and the sound of her Disapparition wouldn't wake Theo. She felt it was as good a plan as any. She assumed there was a tracer on the floor, so she knew that wouldn't work.

Once in the kitchen, she stripped and then opened the flask of polyjuice before putting the hair in it. She pinched her nose as she took a large swallow. The taste was awful, but not as bad as she had anticipated. Clearly the potion was still effective because the change happened immediately. She grimaced at the uncomfortable sensation of being stretched and contorted. Once the transformation was complete, she pulled on his clothes and picked up her own, stuffing them into her large purse. She felt so *huge*. She bumped into the door frame as she left the kitchen and almost tripped over her own feet. It would take her a few minutes to mentally adjust to just how big she was. She definitely couldn't apparate until she was more acclimated. She didn't bother with a note because she knew her handwriting would be all wrong. *Should have written it before drinking the damn potion!* It was too late now. She quietly exited the apartment, grabbing one of Theo's robes to hold over her arm to hide her purse.

She quickly walked down the street, eager to get a few blocks away before Apparating to Draco's. It was so odd... walking down a street she had walked a thousand times before, but this time seeing it through Theo's eyes and from Theo's height. It looked different somehow. She reached the Apparition point quickly, Theo's long legs getting her there at a much faster pace.

When she arrived at Draco's, she knocked on the door, hoping he was home and hoping he would be the one to open it. It suddenly occurred to her that he could have company. What if Astoria opened the door, or Narcissa? Just as she was getting herself worked into a state, Janky opened the door with all the haughtiness of a proper Malfoy elf. "Good evening, Master Theo. Master Draco is working late and won't be home until later."

Hermione smiled and spoke quietly. "Hi Janky," Hermione, or more truthfully, Theo, answered. "It's me, Hermione. I took polyjuice to get away from my flat unnoticed. May I come in?"

Janky's eyes grew wide as saucers. He clearly believed her. "Miss Hermione Granger?" He stood back and gestured into the flat. Once she had entered he peeked out the door, first left then right, confirming she wasn't being watched. He closed the door quickly. His haughty persona was gone and he was himself again as he turned towards her. "Draco will be so pleased you are here. Draco misses Miss and talks about how he wishes he could see her."

"I miss him as well, Janky." She flinched at the sound of her voice. It was so strange to speak and have Theo's voice come out of her mouth. "Is there a way we can contact him? Let him know I'm here?"

"Yes, miss." Janky snapped his fingers, there was a popping sound and he was gone.

Hermione snapped her mouth shut in shock at the elf's sudden disappearance. Within seconds, Janky and Draco appeared in front of her accompanied by another popping sound. Draco immediately stepped back, surprise on his face. "Theo?" He turned to Janky. "You said Hermione was here!"

Hermione rolled her eyes. "It's me Draco. I took polyjuice so that I could get out of the apartment in secret."

He looked at her skeptically with his signature smirk and cocked eyebrow. "When you came for dinner last Monday, which chair did you sit in?"

She thought for a minute, caught off guard by his question. "I didn't sit in a chair. You handfed me."

He smiled, "It is you." He moved his eyes up and down. "Sorry, Pet, I'd hug you and give you a kiss but..."

Hermione swallowed, nervous about her confession. "Never mind that. I need to talk to you."

Janky took Hermione's robes and bag from her, placing them on the chair behind him. "Would Miss like a refreshment?"

Hermione smiled at the sweet elf. "No thank you, Janky." Janky smiled back and then disappeared with another pop.

Draco spoke as he walked towards the living room. "Are you ok? I'm so happy to see you, but I'm surprised." He stopped and looked at her, hope in his voice. "Have you changed your mind?"

She needed to tell him quickly and was about to answer when she felt it. Relief overcame her. She could feel her body begin to shift back to its natural self. Draco was still watching her and his face contorted with bewilderment at what was happening in front of him. He watched her hair change color and grow out; her body shrink and her face contort. His face was one of disgust and curiosity at the same time.

Hermione cringed at the unusual sensation. Theo's jeans fell off her slender frame and pooled at her feet, leaving her in a t-shirt that was huge on her and boxers that were barely

hanging on, the elastic not able to cling tightly enough to her slender frame. Draco's eyes moved to what was going on with her chest as breasts began to grow right in front of him.

"That was... disturbing and hot at the same time," he said with a touch of humor. His eyes shot up to hers, all humor gone as need and desire overcame him. "Fuck, I've missed you." He was on her instantly. His mouth on her lips, his hands wrapped around her, pulling her flush against his sturdy frame. His hands slipped under the elastic band of the shorts and with a slight tug they fell to her ankles, joining the jeans.

Hermione melted into the kiss as desire and need and desperation and fear all washed over her. She pulled away, breathing heavy, her hands in his hair, her eyes on his. God, how she loved his beautiful eyes. She needed to tell him, she needed to confess, she needed him to forgive her. She was desperate. "Draco, I... I..."

His forehead crinkled as he looked down at her. He watched as her eyes looked from his left iris to his right, like she was searching for something, an answer maybe. Her expression seemed desperate, so full of need. "I'm here, Pet. It's ok," he reassured her, not sure what else to say. He rubbed her back gently.

She shook her head as an almost panicked look came over her. She opened her mouth to speak and then froze. To his utter bewilderment, she slipped to the ground, kneeling in position one at his feet.

Draco stared down at her. It took a moment to process what had just happened. Her desperate expression, her need. Fuck, it was his need to! But he would have foregone the submission just to speed things along and take her here and now. He was famished for her. He swallowed, trying to calm his libido and his desire to just take her. She needed his Dominance right now and he would be there for her.

"Pet, is this what you need? Is this what you want, to submit to my will?" She didn't answer, her eyes glued to the floor. "Answer me, Pet."

"Yes, sir." Her voice was determined.

"Look at me." Her eyes shot up to his, the look no longer desperate. Her eyes were focused, conveying no emotion, offering no hints to the thoughts in that magnificent head of hers. His brain was screaming on the other hand. It was screaming *Caution! Beware!* The last time she had done this was because she was being blackmailed. She had been so upset and so hesitant to tell him. *Please, Merlin. Don't let her have another awful burden she has to share. How much more can one person take?*

He crouched down in her front of her, studying her face as her eyes followed him. Her position was stone still, her posture perfect and beautiful. Unfortunately, the shirt covered almost every inch of her as she knelt. He swallowed and chose his words carefully. His tone was soft and soothing. "Pet, what is it. What's happened?" She was silent. "Answer me."

He took a breath of relief when her eyes flickered with a touch of emotion. "Please, sir. I need... I need you to punish me."

What? Draco felt his heart start to race. Something was wrong. Why did she feel the need for a punishment? What had happened? He swallowed the massive lump in his throat. "If I punish you, will you then answer my questions? Tell me what I need to know?" He watched

her for a minute and then shook his head in irritation when she didn't answer. *I think I'm going to have to change that stupid rule.* 'Pet, for the rest of tonight you are to answer my questions promptly, without me having to give you permission to speak.' He took a calming breath. "Now, tell me. If I punish you, will you be forthcoming and tell me what's wrong?"

Her eyes flickered again, a flash of sadness. "Yes... yes, sir. But, it needs to be a real punishment."

Holy Mother of Merlin. Draco ran his hand through his hair as he stood and towered over her. "Do you promise to safeword if it gets to be too much?"

Her voice was small. "Yes, sir."

"Then come with me to my bedroom and take that shirt off." He watched as she started to stand. He reached his hand out and grabbed her arm when she wobbled. He dropped her arm as soon as she was righted. He turned and started to walk quickly to his room, Hermione close on his heels.

When they entered his room, he gestured to the bed. "Bend over the side of the bed. Keep your feet flat on the floor. Lay your chest and left cheek on the mattress and your hands over your head." He watched as she bent over, following his instruction. His eyes couldn't help travelling down her body and taking in her very exposed sex. He wanted her, but shockingly his cock didn't even twitch. He was too worried about what was to come to be aroused.

"What are your safewords tonight?"

"Red and yellow, Sir." Her voice was determined, strong.

"I want you to use the word green as well. If I ask you what color you are, you are to respond green for go, yellow for caution, or red for full stop. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir, I understand."

Draco walked into his closet and pulled down the brown leather belt hanging on the back of the door. As he walked back towards her, he spoke. "Ok, you asked for a real punishment, so I'm assuming you want this to hurt? You feel you have something you need to atone for?"

"Yes, sir. I do."

What could it be? He stepped behind her and to the right, widening his stance and focusing on the task at hand. "I'm going to give you six warm up slaps with my hand and then twelve spanks with the belt. They will hurt." He paused watching her for a reaction. "What color, pet?"

"Green, sir."

He stepped closer and slapped her right butt cheek with a slight upwards motion and then did the same on the left. He continued with four more slaps, not hitting the same spot twice. The slaps were not hard, but they were enough to warm the skin and bring the blood to the surface so that she had a nice pink glow. She hadn't flinched or made a sound. He looked at her face. "What color, pet?"

"Green, sir."

He let out a slow breath as he repositioned himself behind her and readied the belt in his hand. "I am punishing you because you have asked me to. You will count after each stroke." He really didn't like this. He didn't like punishing her when he didn't know why, but he trusted her and would give her what she needed.

Hermione closed her eyes and let out a slow breath. She knew this was going to hurt. She was counting on it.

The first strike came down fast and hard. "One," she said clearly and loudly. *Ok, that stung.*

She took a breath as the second hit came down slightly harder than the first. "Two," she grunted out. The word not as loud and clear as the first.

The third hit was a little lighter than the first two. "Three". Her voice was strong. *Harder Draco!*

There was a pause and she could hear him shift behind her. "Four." *He's afraid he's going to hurt me.* "Harder, sir, Please."

A hard hit landed and she flinched. "Five," she said, her voice slightly choked.

"Six," she yelled out as another hard hit came down. Her eyes watering. *It's still not hard enough!*

The seventh hit was the hardest yet and a sob escaped as she barely choked out. "Seven!"

There was another slight pause before a softer hit landed. *This wouldn't do.* "Eight. Please. Harder, sir!"

Tears were falling freely now. A fierce hit caused her to yell out in pain. It took her a few seconds to catch enough breath to count. "Nine," she said through tears. She was sobbing. "Please, harder, sir. I need it."

"Red."

Hermione's breath hitched when she heard Draco's voice choke with emotion as he safeworded. She heard the belt fall to the floor. Tears still streaming down her face, she looked back at him. His face was anguished, heartbreak apparent in his eyes. "I can't Hermione. I won't. If I hit you any harder, I would have broken your skin." His eyes were red and moist.

She bawled as she looked at him, guilt once again overcoming her. She had not taken his feelings into consideration. She had not thought about how he felt about this. She was selfish. Tears still streaming she choked out, "I'm so sorry, Draco. I'm so sorry." She pulled her knees to her chest and laid on her side. She couldn't stop crying as she started to rock her body.

She felt Draco climb on the bed. He slid next to her and pulled her close. "Shh. It's ok, pet. It's ok. I'm here."

Hermione straightened out her body and snuggled up next to him, her arms pulling him close. "I'm so sorry. Draco. I... I'm so messed up in the head right now."

Draco pulled back from her, tilting her chin up with his forefinger. His eyes were intense on hers. His voice was soft, pleading. His eyes still wet with unshed tears. "Can we just... talk? Like a normal couple. Can you tell me what's wrong without me having to beat you senseless?"

"I slept with Theo." The words came out of her mouth before she had a chance to filter them or soften the blow. She watched as comprehension came over his stunned face.

"When?" He asked, his eyes darkening as he pulled away slightly.

"Yesterday. When I was drunk." She swallowed, waiting for his reaction. Watching as he moved away from her. *Oh, please. Don't pull away... shit, this is bad.*

Draco rolled completely away and moved to sit on the side of the bed. He wasn't looking at her, his voice was low and raw as he asked, "Did he force you?"

Her tears had slowed, she was crying softly as she said, "No, I was so drunk and... I had seen you with Astoria and I was jealous and..."

Draco stood, his tone angry and impatient as he snapped. "I *told* you I wasn't sleeping with her!" His back was to her, his hands on his hips. He seemed to be looking at the floor in front of him.

Hermione sat up, her tone pleading. "I know that! *I know there was no reason for me to be jealous!* And... I'm sorry! I was... I was just so *drunk* and he... he turned on his Dominance and he..."

Draco's head turned to the side, glaring at her. She recoiled at the disgust in his eyes. "Jesus, Hermione. Is that all it takes? A Dominant male in front of you and you spread your legs?"

Hermione was stunned, a fresh wave of tears filled her eyes. Her jaw fell as what felt like ice water ran through her veins. She felt like the rug had been pulled out from under her. She felt like she was drowning. She knew he would be upset, sad, disappointed. She hadn't thought that he would be cruel.

She didn't answer him. She didn't feel like the accusation warranted an answer. She slid off the bed and picked Theo's t-shirt up off the floor.

Her voice was calm and factual but had a slight tremor. "I was drunk, I was upset, and I wasn't thinking clearly. I was excited about my court case and went out with my co-workers to celebrate. Earlier in the week, Ezmirelda had stopped by and threatened that if I didn't start being intimate with Theo again and produce an heir, she would release the photos." Hermione stepped further away, towards the door. 'I've been terrified, and overwhelmed, and *missing you* so much!' Her voice trembled with emotion. "Yesterday, at the bar, I was trying to escape from my *miserable* reality for a little while. When you came in with Astoria, in my drunken condition, I became insanely jealous. I made a terrible, terrible decision. It was an awful mistake... and I'm sorry. I'm so sorry, Draco. I just..."

His eyes cut to her form. "Ezmirelda came to see you? Why didn't you tell me?"

She wiped her wet cheeks. That's all he took away from her speech? "I didn't have a chance! I... well, I was going to tell you in my office today, but you had to leave."

Draco didn't say anything else. He refused to look at her. She was a combination of heartbroken and starting to feel angry with his lack of response.

She sniffled, her voice resigned. "I'm sorry, Draco." She walked with purpose out of his room and to the living room. She grabbed her purse and took her clothes out, dressing quickly. She tossed Theo's things into the bag and grabbed his robe. As she opened the front door she could hear him coming into the living room. She quickly stepped into the hall. She had just turned to Apparate when she heard him call out, "Wait, I'm sor —" She was already gone.

Chapter 27

Friday Evening, Cont...

She landed outside the door and opened it quickly, stepping inside and closing it before Draco would have a chance to catch her if he was in pursuit. She dropped her bag on the floor and absently walked to the sofa, collapsing on it and laying on her side. Tears and regret overcame her. She was mentally and emotionally exhausted. She just couldn't take anymore... not one more thing.

She drew her knees up to her chest. It was for the best. This was all just too difficult and she couldn't do it anymore. Her emotions were raw, her body so tired, her mind overwhelmed. She needed to let Draco go. *Oh Gods...* The pain of that thought caused a small sob to escape her lips. She wiped her cheeks. His reaction... his anger, it had disarmed her, but she realized it shouldn't have. His hurt was justified. She sighed as she rolled onto her back. *It's an impossible situation.*

Her resolve strengthened as she stared at the ceiling. She would finish out her six months with Theo. She would focus on her work, her case before the Wizengamot. At the end of six months? Well, who knew what would happen then. Maybe things would work out between them. But, for now... she couldn't navigate the complicated waters of this triangle. She was Theo's wife. He and his mother held the cards and much to Hermione's frustration and humiliation, she was trapped in their grasp... at least for now.

She sat up carefully, letting out a shaky breath. Her bottom was really tender. She stood up, grabbed her bag and slowly walked back to the bedroom. Theo was still sound asleep. She tossed his borrowed clothes from her bag into the dirty laundry basket and went back to the kitchen. The owl post box at the window was full of mail from the past few days. With everything that had been going on, neither of them had checked it. She poured herself a glass of water as she mindlessly went through it all, dividing it into his and her piles. It was a welcome distraction. There were a few bills, a few notices from various doctor's offices which she was sure were reminders of her upcoming annual appointments and there was a ton of junk mail. She threw out the junk mail and set the bills and other pieces of mail aside. She would open and read them this weekend.

Deciding a soak in the tub would help to relax her and help to soothe her sore behind, she headed to the bathroom. She turned on the water and added her favorite bath enhancing potion. She undressed and carefully slid into the welcoming, hot water. She leaned back and closed her eyes, deeply inhaling the moist, warm, verbena scented air. *Yes. This is what you need, Hermione, to relax. You need to minimize the stress in your life.*

Unfortunately, it wasn't long before she felt her eyes prick and sting with unshed tears as her thoughts went back to Draco. She could try not to think about him, try to forget him, at least for now, but she knew it would be next to impossible. He had come into her life with such a force. Theo's Affair had turned her world upside down, but Draco had already shifted its axis. *You were going to leave Theo, Hermione. Before you knew he had been cheating, you had decided to leave him. It was Draco, Draco had been the catalyst for that decision.*

Despite everything that had happened, she was glad Draco came along when he did. He had reminded her what it felt like to be cherished. He had not only brought back spice into her sex life, but he had brought so much more... love, humor, excitement, anticipation. *Gods, Hermione.* She groaned at the realization that if Draco hadn't come along, she would probably still be living as Theo's unsuspecting and self-deprecating wife. She may be miserable at this particular moment, and may have Ezmirelda and Theo blackmailing her, but she was no longer the clueless and naive wife. She would be eternally grateful to Draco for that, no matter how it all turned out in the end.

It wasn't long before she wasn't only thinking about Draco but berating herself as well. She had monumentally screwed up by sleeping with Theo and she should have found a better way to tell Draco it had happened. She had been impulsive and inconsiderate. What she did to Draco was unfair... asking him to punish her without an explanation. And then running away when he reacted poorly to her confession. *What were you thinking?* She slid lower into the tub, bringing the water line up to her chin.

She could lay in this tub and despair and regret to her hearts content, but it would change nothing. Nothing would change the fact that she was stuck with Theo for another five and a half months. She should just focus on work. Her relationship with Draco would have to wait. If he couldn't wait, and found another, then so be it. She forced herself to not think about that possibility. She could do this. She could gain control of her emotions, if not her future. She was even more resolved the more she thought about it. It was the right decision, no matter how hard. Once again, she needed to rely on her logic and not her emotion.

The weekend was a quiet one. Theo had slept all through Friday evening and was up earlier than usual on Saturday. He didn't crowd her or ask her to talk. He had learned his lesson and knew better than to force anything. They each read, but in separate rooms and didn't interact much. Hermione was relieved he was giving her space and hoped he might finally be coming to terms with the fact that their relationship was over. She wasn't sure if his realizing that fact would be a good thing or not. It would depend on what he disclosed to his meddling and sadistic mother.

Sunday rolled around, and it was more of the same. Hermione did some grocery shopping and Theo went through his stack of mail and paid some bills.

It was late afternoon when the doorbell rang. Theo was in the living room and Hermione in the kitchen. She stepped into the living room and met Theo's eye. Neither of them were expecting company.

"I'll get it," Hermione said as she walked towards the door. Her heart had begun to race in the anticipation it might be Draco. She internally chastised herself for hoping for something that would only make her life more difficult. She looked through the peephole, disappointed to find it was a head of blonde hair she despised. "Your mother!" she spat with irritation. *Gods, she hated that woman.*

Theo jumped up as Hermione was about to open the door. "Wait!" He exclaimed in a loud whisper. He dashed to her side and pulled her to him, crushing his mouth on hers, kissing her soundly. Hermione squealed and tried to push him away, but he wouldn't relent his hold on her. One of his hands moved to her head and mussed her hair. The doorbell rang again as he chewed on her bottom lip, untucked her shirt and fingers began unbuttoning her blouse. She

finally shoved him away. “Theo, what the...” But he was ignoring her. He had stepped back and was mussing up his own hair and pulled off his shirt. Hermione’s jaw fell as she realized what he was doing. “You could have told me!” She chastised quietly, but not harshly. It was a clever and helpful idea.

“Ok, open it,” he whispered. As Hermione opened the door, Theo was standing behind her, his arms wrapped around her, nibbling on her ear. The haughty elder witch froze at the sight before her.

“Hi Mother,” Theo said with a big smile as he slapped Hermione’s bottom affectionately. Hermione maintained a fake smile as she slightly jumped and let out a small squeal in pain. Unbeknownst to Theo, Hermione’s bottom was still tender from Friday night.

Ezmirelda walked in, her hawk eyes astutely scanning Hermione’s just kissed mouth, messy hair and half buttoned blouse. A fake smile curled over her charmed white teeth. “I’m sorry to drop by like this, but I just wanted to see how you two were doing.” Her eyes were now on Theo.

Theo was pulling on his shirt and making a show of smoothing his hair. He immediately pulled Hermione back into his arms. “Things are great!” He looked down at Hermione and smiled as she looked back up at him, a beaming fake smile on her face. ‘Hermione and I... well, we are working on things. We are both devoted to our marriage and we aren’t willing to give up on it.’ He looked down at her again. “Are we kitten?”

Hermione was dumfounded but managed to maintain her smile. *Say something!* “Yes, Theo’s right.” She looked up at him and back at Ezmirelda. She re-buttoned her blouse as she added, “things are much better and it’s because we’re communicating.”

Ezmirelda seemed skeptical but then her face softened, and she smiled at Theo. She stepped over to him and kissed his cheek. “I’m glad things are better my dear boy.” She pat his cheek affectionately, her long red nails like talons against his pale skin. She then turned to Hermione and smiled. “Take care of my boy, young lady.” The underlying meaning was not lost on Hermione.

Hermione smiled sweetly, “Oh, I plan to.”

Ezmirelda sighed. “Well, I’ll be off then. I’m having dinner at the Parkinson’s.”

Theo smiled as he stepped towards the door with his mother, leading her out. “Have fun, Mother. Love you.” She stepped further into the hallway and Apparated away.

Theo closed the door and leaned his back against it, letting out a big sigh as he looked at the floor.

Hermione’s voice was soft and genuine. “Theo... thank you.”

He swallowed and lifted his head, meeting her eyes. His voice was soft and conciliatory. “It’s not right what she’s asking of you. I want you back, Hermione, but I don’t want my mother making things harder than they already are.” He pushed himself away from the door. “It’s not any of her business. We’ll take this slow and at the end of the six months we’ll either have worked things out or we won’t.”

Hermione watched him as he walked back towards the sofa. “Ok, Theo. You help me with Ezmirelda, and I’ll give you the 5 1/2 months we have left.”

He didn’t look at her as he picked up his book. “That’s all I’m asking for,” he said quietly as he opened it.

Hermione buttoned her blouse and smoothed her hair as she walked back to the kitchen to get started on dinner.

Monday

Monday morning, Hermione arrived at work to find an owl post from Draco. She recognized his handwriting and held the letter, not sure if she wanted to open it. Her fingers trembled slightly as she broke the seal.

H—

I’m truly sorry about my reaction on Friday. I was surprised, extremely hurt and angry. I understand why you fled, I was out of line. What I said was unfair and I’m sorry.

The truth is, I love you. I want you. But our situation is unbearable for me. I wish you would leave him, but I respect your decision to stay. However, I can’t be on the sidelines as you live and sleep with your husband. I was willing to settle for that when I first pursued you, but now, I want so much more, and I can’t put myself through that torture. I’m going to live my life the next 6 months and hope that when the time comes, you’ll come find me. My feelings will be unchanged. That, I am quite sure of. If you change your mind about leaving him sooner, I stand by what I told you before, we’ll handle the fallout together.

Yours,

D

Hermione let the letter fall from her fingers onto the desk and rubbed her forehead. She had pressure behind her eyes as the headache took hold. She had been getting headaches constantly the past couple weeks from all the stress she was under. She opened her drawer and pulled out another headache potion, tossing it back quickly.

Her thoughts went back to the note as she rubbed her eyes. On the one hand she was glad he was thinking along the same lines as her, but on the other, she wanted her knight in shining armor to bust down the door and ravish her. She wanted him to refuse to let her pull away, even if it was only temporary. But the logical side of her brain recognized the foolishness of that fantasy and realized they would likely end up right back where they are now.

She didn’t want to think about it anymore and instead grabbed the files Draco had dropped off Friday and started going through them. She needed to be sure everything they needed was included. She was anticipating hearing from the Wizengemot any day and her court date could be next week or in six months. There was no telling. Therefore, she needed to be ready. First, she needed to make sure the files he handed over included everything she needed and that nothing had been taken out. She still felt guilty for how she had gotten the files originally. One day she would come clean about that, but it might be a very long time before she confessed.

Hermione heard the front door of the office open and heard the unmistakable voice of Rita Skeeter, "Is Mrs. Nott available? I need to speak with her."

"Uh, Hi Rita. I'm not sure she's in her office. Let me check," Lizzy lied convincingly.

Hermione nodded when Lizzy cracked her door. "I'm back, Lizzy. Just flooded in. You can let Ms. Skeeter in."

Rita walked in, her stiff, over processed hair and curls framing her round face and glittered frames. She approached Hermione's desk. "I haven't heard anything from you, Hermione. What's going on with your case? I left those files and haven't heard a peep since!" The witch was clearly irritated.

Hermione held her hands up in mock surrender. "I know, I'm sorry. There isn't much to report. The review board has agreed to put our case before the Wizengamot. I don't know when it will be. You will be the first person I tell, after Moxie, of course."

Rita let out a small huff of irritation and then sat. Hermione followed suit and sat in her chair, gingerly. Her bottom was still tender.

"What about that exclusive story you promised?" Rita asked, doubt in her voice.

Hermione's face fell slightly. She had forgotten about that. After a moment's thought she responded, sincerely, "I Promise you'll get your exclusive, Rita. Nothing is official yet, but when it is, I'll give you the story first."

Rita looked skeptically at Hermione over the rim of her glasses. "Hmpf. I wonder if this 'exclusive' you've promised is worth what I gave up. News about the Malfoys sells papers, Hermione!"

Hermione nodded in understanding. "I know, I know they do. But I promise the exclusive will sell papers as well. However, you need to know it might not be for a few months."

Rita's face turned red and she stood, her voice an octave higher. "A few months?"

Hermione held her ground. "Yes, Rita, a few months. Please sit down." She gestured to the chair Rita had just stood from. Rita let out a bark of air as she sat stiffly.

Hermione spoke softly but her words were firm in their meaning. "I made a promise to you and will keep it, but you must keep your promise to me as well. I will control how news about ME's involvement in these future proceedings is disclosed via the Prophet. Also, you need to destroy your copies of the ME employment files. I have obtained what we need legally. You need to destroy what you obtained illegally. It's to protect us both and to protect this case."

Rita looked angry and didn't respond. Hermione continued. "How about I fill you in on the meeting with the review board and you can write an article about that. You can say that Hermione Nott is now championing the cause of magical beings in the work place. You can mention Moxie and her complaint."

Rita contemplated. "Fine, tell me what happened."

By the time Rita left it was after lunch. Lizzy saved the day by walking in Hermione's office carrying chicken salad sandwiches. The witches ate as they dived back into the Malfoy files. Hermione was pleased the files contained everything the originals did. This meant ME

wasn't manipulating evidence. By four o'clock, both Hermione and Lizzy were practically cross eyed with exhaustion.

Hermione dropped her quill and waved her wand, magically dividing and stacking the files as needed. "Let's call it a day, Lizzy. We can start fresh tomorrow."

Lizzy nodded and stifled a yawn. "That works for me. Let me just check the afternoon owl post and make sure nothing has arrived since I've been in here."

Hermione had cleared her desk and was grabbing her bag when Lizzy walked back into Hermione's office. She was waiving an official letter with a Ministry seal. Lizzy placed the letter in Hermione's anxious grasp. Hermione opened it and looked up at Lizzy. "Three weeks, Lizzy. Three weeks from today!"

That evening, Hermione sat at the kitchen table and wrote Draco. She needed to respond to his earlier owl. Theo was engrossed in a book by the fireplace.

Draco,

Thanks for your note. You have nothing to apologize for. I handled it all so poorly. I panicked and put you in an unfair situation by asking you to punish me. Then I added insult to injury by carelessly blurting out information that would have devastated me had the tables been turned. I'm sorry about all of it. But, most of all, I'm sorry I got so drunk on Thursday. If I hadn't been so intoxicated, it never would have happened. That's no excuse and I claim full responsibility for my actions.

As far as the rest of what you wrote, it breaks my heart to agree with you. But you are right. You shouldn't sit on the sideline while I deal with this miserable situation. Live your life. I'm going to focus on work... really dive into it. I have five and a half more months with Theo. Hopefully, it will go fast. I'll come find you when the time comes. I'll be the luckiest witch in the world if you still want me. But I'll understand if you don't. You owe me nothing, Draco. I love you... so much! I'm sorry everything is so screwed up.

Yours,

H

She rolled and sealed the note before walking to the open window. Bernie was sitting on his favorite branch and flew right over. She whispered as she tied the letter on the owl's leg. "Take this to Draco, Bernie. Make sure he gets it." The owl let out a soft hoot before flying off. Hermione watched him until he was nothing but a speck of dust on the horizon. *That's that then.*

She turned away and walked into the living room. Theo was watching her. She wondered if he heard her send the owl.

"I heard from the Ministry today. My case is in three weeks."

Theo nodded. "That's good then, right? Not too long of a wait?"

Hermione nodded. "Yep, that's a good thing." After a brief pause she said, "I'm going to bed. It's been a long day." She turned and walked away towards the bedroom. She had spoken to him and shared something about her day. That's about all she could offer right now.

Chapter 28

Same disclaimer as always. I own none of this. These characters, and the wizarding world they love in, all belong to JKR and her publishers.

A huge thanks to LissaDream. She pretty much co-writes everything I post these days. She and I are officially co-writing two stories, *Master Mine* and *A World Not Fit to Live In*. Please check them out if you haven't already done so. Love you, LD!

Thanks to all who review! It means soo much and I am very grateful. I read them all and take all suggestions and comments to heart. :)

Friday

Hermione spent the rest of the week preparing her evidence for her presentation and proposal. Moxie, as well as the five other individuals whom they had determined suffered some form of discrimination, were each prepared to testify about their interview process. The discrimination was subtle in most cases, and Hermione didn't feel it had been intentional. Ultimately, she felt some cultural education would help the hiring department at ME overcome these issues. Human wizards and witches simply weren't aware or understanding of the culture of other magical beings.

For example, Draco had said Moxie hadn't done well on the peer part of the interview. Hermione wondered if those "peers" had understood goblin culture. Did they know that pleasantries in the workplace were very frowned upon? Goblins socialized, but not at work and definitely not during work hours. Draco had said they had found Moxie to be dismissive, self-righteous, and condescending. However, more than likely, what she had actually been — was a goblin. Bodric had been hired, true. Yet, Bodric hadn't spent six years working in the formal environment at Gringotts like Moxie had. Bodric had worked for an accounting firm in Ireland which was owned by an elderly Muggle-born couple. After working with them for three years, he had developed some human-like social skills. Goblins are taught from a young age to instill confidence in their clients by being firm and steadfast in their dealings. What others perceive as arrogance, is actually confidence. Goblins don't coddle and offer candy to babies — they are factual. Moxie had walked into that peer interview exhibiting the most professional, knowledgeable, and confident goblin she could be. Unfortunately (and this was Hermione's assumption, but her assumptions were usually correct) those behaviors had been mislabeled as dismissive, self-righteous, and condescending.

By the time Friday rolled around, Hermione felt she was ready for the Wizengamot. She still had two weeks until the case, but she had completely engrossed herself with it over the past five days. It had been her best defense against the sadness that threatened to overcome her. Thinking about the blond wizard who consumed her dreams was painful. She didn't want to imagine his soft lips or his arrogant and flirtatious smile. She didn't want to envision his hands on her skin, his mouth on her breasts, his palm on her bottom. She didn't want to dream about losing herself in his beautiful steel grey eyes. Eyes that caused her to melt with their adoration, caused her to laugh with their flirtatious and playful gleam, and caused her heart to race in anticipation when they became dark with desire.

She shook her head. *Stop thinking about him! It's over — at least for now!*

This was what happened every evening when she finally put down her quill and let her mind wander away from Moxie's case, though. Her thoughts didn't go to how late it was or how Theo would be upset she wasn't home yet. She didn't think about the fact she had barely been eating, or about the six pounds she had lost since the prior Friday. Her thoughts were consumed by Draco, and each evening it was worse than the evening before.

Lizzy was long gone by the time Hermione stood from her desk. The wall clock said it was nine-thirty. Time had really passed by her today, and regretfully she realized Theo might be upset. She had barely paid him any notice since Monday. She told him it was the case, and he said he understood, but each evening she could sense his irritation building and knew it wouldn't be long until he cried foul. She couldn't afford for that to happen. She was worried he would tell her she owed him an extra week because she hadn't been trying. She couldn't stand that, because she felt her resolve slipping. Hermione's desire to see Draco was threatening to overtake her reason. She missed him so much and the thought of five months and one week turning into five months and two weeks was more than she could bear.

Deciding on some damage control, she stopped by one of Theo's favorite restaurants and picked up his favorite trifle for dessert. Perhaps if she did something nice for him and told him she had wanted to get home earlier, he would be more understanding. It was a lie, and the trifle was merely a tool of deception, but he was the one forcing her to play this game. He was the one who wouldn't accept the reality that their marriage was over. He was the one who irrationally felt forcing her to live with him would somehow miraculously cause her to trust him again, to desire him again, to fall in love with him again. He was a fool.

She opened the door to a dark apartment. Placing her purse and his dessert on the kitchen counter, she headed to the bedroom to look for him. He wasn't there, and he wasn't in the office/library either. This was not a good sign, and there was no note. Theo always left her notes when he went out.

She let out a heavy sigh as she changed out of her work clothes and put on an oversized t-shirt and yoga pants. She washed her face and hands and looked at her gaunt reflection in the mirror. She had circles under her eyes, her facial bones were more prominent than a week before, and her skin was pale. She didn't look good, and frankly, she didn't feel good. *You keep this up and Draco won't want you in five months!* She turned out the bathroom light and padded back to the kitchen. She opened the fridge and put the dessert inside as her stomach fell with the thoughts that kept spinning her head. *He's going to forget about you, Hermione. He's going to move on, and you will have no one to blame but yourself!*

Spotting Beauty on the sofa, she sat next to her familiar and rubbed her head. Beauty turned towards her, purring as she kneaded Hermione's leg with her front paws.

Hermione heard the click of the door and turned to see a stone-faced Theo walk in. "Ah, I see you've decided to come home," he said as he walked behind the sofa and headed to their bedroom.

Shit!

She stood and followed him. "Yeah, sorry I'm so late. I totally lost track of time."

She stood in the doorway to their bedroom, watching him as he placed his wand on the bedside table and emptied the contents of his pockets.

He glanced at her coldly. "Yeah, I get it. There's nothing going on in your life that's as important as work." He shrugged, his words were sarcastic. "It's not like your marriage and reputation are on the line or anything."

She felt her face growing warm and she bit the retort that threatened to spill from her mouth.

Theo looked up at her and cocked an eyebrow. "This is the kind of behavior that forces your wizard into the arms of another."

His words sparked a fuse within her that burned through all her frustrations of the week. "You know what? Fuck you, Theo. Fuck this marriage, fuck the photos, and fuck this apartment. I'm done."

Blanching, Theo watched her grab a bag out of the closet and begin to throw her clothes into it. "Hey, hey... I'm sorry ok?" She headed into the bathroom to pack her toiletries, ignoring him. "What I said was meant to hurt you... because... because, I'm hurting." His voice had become small and his words slightly choked.

She paused and let out a breath, staring at the floor. "Theo, I'm in love with another man. I don't love you. I... I don't want to waste five more months pretending like this is something I want to fight for. I will *never* love you again. You betrayed me for five years, and you're expecting me to forget that and trust you again. I can't!"

"Hermione, I'm sorry. I really am. I've been miserable all week because you've barely been home, and I snapped." He stepped out of the bathroom and sat on the side of the bed. 'Just stay.' He picked at a loose thread on his pants absently. His voice was resigned. "I... I think I'm finally believing that our marriage is truly over. I was hoping for a miracle, I guess." He looked up at her. "If you leave, my mother will make your life hell. At least stay here... live here so that she's none the wiser."

Hermione felt a flicker of hope blossom in her chest. "What about... what about Draco?"

He shook his head. "Do you *have* to have him as well? I'm giving in, Hermione. I'm conceding that our marriage is over! I can't fathom the thought of you sleeping with him... or any other wizard... while your living under this roof, though. I'm just not that selfless."

She started to open her mouth to protest, but he interrupted her. "If you're going to see him, then you need to leave. It will only be a matter of time before Mother finds out, and you know what that means. If you want my cooperation and my acceptance, then you'll live here and not see any other wizards until our time is up and you move out."

Hermione wrapped her arms around herself, clasping each elbow with the opposite hand. She looked at him cautiously. "Why do you even need the five months, Theo? What are they for?"

He looked up at her, crossing his arms. "It's going to take that long to convince my mother that I want to divorce you and that she needs to allow it."

Hermione placed her bag on the dresser and moved to stand in front of him. Her tone was careful, almost disbelieving. “I want to be sure I’m understanding you correctly. You are agreeing to a divorce. I don’t have to give our relationship another chance. You’re going to start working on Ezmirelda now. Telling her the divorce is what you want, that it’s *your* choice. You’re going to start working on tearing down her resolve.”

Theo closed his eyes and sighed despondently. “Yes. Yes, to all of it.”

“In return for your help, I can’t see Draco.”

Theo looked at her with pained eyes. “I can’t take it. It will kill me if you’re with him all the time, that you would come here after being in his arms. I’m not made of stone, Hermione. I’ll do everything I can to tell help you with my mother. I’ll lie to her, I’ll mislead her — but if you are living under this roof with me, then my one demand is you not see Draco or any other wizard romantically. If you move out, I’ll... I’ll still try to convince my mother, but I think our chances of success are better if she thinks you’re trying. She has to think it’s coming from me.”

“Why can’t you tell her that you kicked me out? Tell her you realized you not only don’t love me, but you despise me. Tell her you made me leave.”

Theo looked up at her, and Hermione thought she saw a flash of something behind his eyes. It was gone in an instant. He answered, simply. “My mother would never believe that of me. She knows I would never do that to you. Not unless you did something terrible, and if she thinks you did something terrible, those photos are as good as published.” His tone was more confident. “Be smart, Hermione. This is the best way.”

Saturday Morning

Hermione drank her morning tea feeling lighter than she had in weeks. Theo was finally being reasonable. As much as it irritated her that he was keeping her from Draco, she understood his reasons. It was somewhat selfish of him to restrict her life in such a way, but then again, it was somewhat selfish of her to ask him to lie to his mother — to ask him to carry on the necessary facade when his heart was broken. She knew he was hurting, and a part of her felt bad about that, but this was ultimately his doing. After all, he was the one who strayed five years ago and had kept a secret affair going for the same amount of time. Hermione owed Theo nothing in that regard.

She needed a distraction, something to keep her from thinking about Draco. She contemplated going into the office, but felt like a change of scenery. Theo walked out of the bedroom, looking like he was about to go for a run.

Hermione cocked a playful eyebrow. “Running? Really? What brought this on? You haven’t worn those running shoes in years!”

Theo smiled as he started to stretch on the living room floor. “I want to feel better. I want to feel stronger — mentally and physically. I’ve grown a little soft around the middle.” He patted his stomach, grinning. Hermione had to admit he had very little fat, he might not have a defined six pack like Draco, but Theo was not fat. She sipped her tea and sighed, realizing he was right. Exercise was smart. It was something she could benefit from as well.

She stood up and dumped her tea in the sink. “Give me ten minutes, I’ll go with you.”

Twenty minutes later, Hermione was bent at the waist, completely out of breath and unable to speak. Theo was trotting in place next to her, a grin on his face.

Her hands were on her knees and her face beet red with exertion, her words came out in gasps between heaving breaths of air. “I can’t” *breathe* ‘believe’ *breathe* “people do this” *breathe* “to themselves” *breathe* “on purpose!”

Theo chuckled as he continued to effortlessly jog in place. “Well, it’s not for everyone.” His tone became teasing. ‘But I can’t believe Hermione Nott... err Granger,’ he conceded with an awkward pause before shrugging it off and smirking at her once again. “I can’t believe Hermione Granger is such a wimp she can’t even run a mile.”

Hermione forced herself upright, still breathing heavy. Her tone was playful. “I see what you’re doing!” *Breathe*. “I won’t fall for your taunting!”

Theo turned away, pointing to the park next to them, his tone still mischievous. “Ok, then. I’m going to *actually start* running now. You just have a seat on that bench over there with that old lady feeding the pigeons. Perhaps that won’t be too strenuous for you.”

Hermione’s breath was evening out and her heart rate was slowing back to a normal pace. “Oh no, I said I was going running, and I plan to run. Until I either finish two miles or I have a heart attack trying.”

“Ok then. Let’s get a move on, shall we?” Theo started to run and Hermione heaved a big breath as she took off after him.

One Hour Later

“This is all your fault, you know.” Hermione readjusted the ice on her ankle.

“And just how is it my fault?” Theo was flipping through the pages of *Magical Treatment and Home Cures for Everyday Injuries and Maladies* as he stood over her.

She smirked up at him, imitating his voice. “I can’t believe Hermione Granger is such a wimp she can’t even run a mile.”

Theo grinned back at her. “I found it. Now hold still.” He waved his wand over her ankle and whispered the diagnostic spell. “*Fractus Revealus*.” They both breathed out a sigh of relief when the resulting swirl of magic around her ankle displayed no red spots, indicating there was no fracture.

Theo began flipping through the pages, looking for the section on ankle sprains as he responded. “You were the one who invited yourself to come running with me — you have no one to blame but yourself. It’s not *my* fault of you have the coordination of a drunk grindylow.”

“I am perfectly coordinated, as you well know! It was ungentlemanly of you to take me on the cobblestone trail. I mean honestly, who runs on that?!”

Theo cocked a teasing eyebrow as he peeked over the book and met her gaze. “Hermione, that sign you saw as we entered the trail... what did it say?”

She looked away, rolling her eyes, a tinge of pink flooding her cheeks. “I know what it said.”

“Uh huh... let me refresh your memory of the sign you stopped to read and then *completely* disregarded. It said: *beginner runners, please use the ankle stabilization spell — Tarso Firmum.*”

Hermione hmped and looked away, dismissing his teasing rebuke. After a sigh, she looked back at him. “Oh, all right! I should have cast the damn spell. Would you mind fixing my ankle already?!”

That evening Hermione and Theo enjoyed Chinese takeout as they watched Pixar’s *Finding Nemo* on the video player. Hermione rarely watched television, but Theo had popped it in the machine and she had found her attention pulled from her book, despite her attempts to ignore it. It was an adorable story. After dinner, Hermione surprised Theo when she pulled out the Trifle she had picked up the night before. They shared it and then retired to bed, exhausted from their full day.

As Hermione settled into her pillow, she felt a touch of happiness that she hadn’t felt since moving back in with Theo almost three weeks ago. *It was a good day*, she thought as the tug of sleep pulled at her. A piece of her felt like when it was all said and done, she and Theo might be able to maintain some sort of friendship.

Theo could hardly contain the smile that threatened to spread across his face. He rolled away from her, just to be sure she wouldn’t catch the excitement he was struggling to conceal. His plan was already working. It was a last ditch attempt, but when she had said she was leaving the night before, instinct had told him this was the only play he had left. Tell her he was conceding to the divorce, get her to let her guard down. Simply be her friend. Be the man she had fallen for seven years ago. Five months of days like today and she would be his again.

AN: More Draco in the next chapter... promise!

Chapter 29

Same disclaimer as always, we own none of this and make no profit.

Sending out a huge thank you to everyone who reviewed the last chapter. I am embarrassed it took so long to update! The amazing LissaDream is now officially co-writing this with me and both of our muses abandoned us. We just couldn't get this chapter together. We didn't write at all over the winter holidays and have just this week started to get our groove back. We are working on the next chapter of *Master Mine* this weekend and hope to get it posted soon.

Thanks to all who review, fav and follow :) Your reviews fuel us more than you realize! Hope everyone's 2018 is off to a good start!

The rest of the weekend was easy. Hermione felt as if a weight had come off her shoulders now that Theo understood where things stood between them. It seemed that acceptance had been therapeutic for him as he was much more relaxed around her now. Gone were the tension filled silences. Gone were the looks that made her feel guilty, and gone was the constant feeling of dread every time they were alone. She found she enjoyed his company more than she had in years, and they had fallen into a comfortable routine.

The workweek continued in much the same way. Because she was essentially prepared for the Wizengemot, she had not needed to work as late and was home in time for dinner most evenings. Theo even surprised her by cooking spaghetti one night and hamburgers another. It was simple fare, but she was pleased he was preparing himself for the life of a bachelor. He inquired how to prepare certain dishes and asked her to write down recipes for a few of his favorite dishes she had cooked over the years. He was laid back, funny, and engaging. They laughed and talked about books and even made plans to go into Muggle London on the upcoming Saturday to see a movie.

It was a relief that Theo had done such a one-eighty. She felt closer to him now than she had in years. Hermione was particularly pleased when he informed her that he had partaken in lunch with his mother on Wednesday and had begun to lay the foundation for the gradual decline of his marriage. He was keeping his promise to sway Ezmirelda and the process had begun.

Friday morning started the same way every other morning had since she had last seen her blond lover. It had now been two weeks, and he was still the first thing she thought of in the morning and the last thing she thought about while she waited for sleep to claim her each night. She had disciplined herself to think about him at those times only. For a while, he had been in her thoughts practically every waking moment and she had hardly been able to function at work. However, in true Hermione fashion, she had mastered her emotions and was able to put off thinking about him as necessary.

As she stared at the ceiling, she wondered what he was he was doing at that very moment. Was he thinking about her? What had he been up to? Irrational jealousy consumed her when she imagined him with another witch. Could he be dating someone new? Perhaps he contracted a submissive? Her stomach churned at the thought. She knew it was wrong and she knew it was unfair to feel that way. This had all been her choice. *She* was the one who was still married, not him.

She rolled onto her side and flipped her pillow. *Damn Ezmirelda and those bloody photos!* Hermione considered herself a good and moral person, but there were times she felt Ezmirelda really needed a dose of her own medicine. Hermione suspected the crow had a lover, but Ezmirelda never mentioned such things to Theo. She would certainly not talk about it with Hermione. Hermione wondered if Draco was still having Ezmirelda and Theo followed by private detectives. If so, maybe the answers Hermione desired were available. However, she didn't know if she had the strength to see Draco and ask him. Besides, he would certainly tell Hermione if anything condemning or scandalous had been discovered or witnessed. *Wouldn't he?* She tried to ignore her answer. *Not if he's moved on...* Hermione rubbed her eyes and let out a huff of frustration. She had known separating herself from him would be hard, but she had thought it would be easier after a couple weeks. If anything, it was becoming more difficult. She didn't like feeling so removed and disconnected from him — she loved him. She wanted to be with him. Draco made frequent appearances in her dreams which proved how ingrained he was in her subconscious. Realizing she would likely see him at the Ministry for her case in a week, she decided she would wait and ask him then if his detectives had uncovered anything.

Finally climbing out of bed, she paused when she heard Theo swear loudly.

"Bloody hell," he exclaimed as he marched into their bedroom. Sitting on the side of the bed, Hermione looked back over her shoulder to find him leaning against the door frame waving a parchment. He tossed the letter onto the bed-stand and looked at it as though it had personally offended him. 'Mother's annual *Adopt a Muggle-born* Ball is tomorrow night!' He looked at her guiltily and added, "She reminded me at lunch, but I still managed to forget."

Hermione felt dread wash over her and zap all motivation to get out of bed. She collapsed back on her pillow and rolled to her left side facing the sulking Slytherin. She spoke softly. "I don't suppose we can get out of going this year?"

Theo shook his head lightly and ran his right hand through his messy locks. "You know we have to go. We'll never hear the end of it if we don't." Hermione couldn't help but notice how sexy a shirtless Theo was. His green and blue scotch plaid pajama bottoms were resting low on his hips, leaving his toned abdomen and chest on display. His morning stubble and uncombed, messy hair begged for hands to run through them. While she would not act on it for a plethora of reasons, she could not deny that she was still physically attracted to her husband... soon to be ex.

Theo stepped forward and collapsed onto his side of the bed, not touching her. Neither one said anything as they mutually dealt with their disappointment. The event was an annual gala where magical families figuratively 'adopted' Hogwarts incoming Muggle-born students. Each magical family took their adopted Muggle-born under their wing and prepared him or her for their entry into Hogwarts and the magical world. None of the new students would be at the actual event, only names would be provided. Each participating magical family would

draw the name of an incoming student out of a hat. The event was always held in June and the magical families would reach out to their Muggle-borns towards the end of July and provide guidance up to and including the start of the schoolyear.

On the surface it seemed a noble and well-intentioned cause, but Hermione knew better. Several of the magical families came across condescending and superior to their charge, and rather than making the Muggle-born feel welcome and prepared, he or she entered Hogwarts feeling unworthy, undeserving, overwhelmed, and hopeless. These ill-intentioned magical families used that time to plant the seed of unworthiness in the unsuspecting children. It was an underhanded and cunning way for pureblood traditions to be upheld and Muggle-borns to be knocked down a peg disguised as a good deed.

On the flip-side, most magical families were honest, helpful, and sincere in their assignment. It was only the purebloods who had supported Voldemort and who were pretending to be reformed who were the problem. Hermione's mother-in-law being a chief offender. The Parkinsons and Selwyns were close behind. Hermione was unsure about the Malfoys, but would wager more than a few galleons they were every bit as guilty as Ezmirelda.

Hermione and Theo lay facing each other, each lost in their own thoughts. Hermione was pulled from hers when Theo took her hand. "With everything going on, kitten, I think it's more important we go this year than ever before. You need to be on her good side and, while we know my mother does this for show only, some good does come of it."

Hermione rolled onto her back, absently pulling her hand away and rubbing her eyes. "I know, I know. After five years you think she would grow tired of the façade and pass the reigns of this cause to another."

Theo laughed without humor. "Fat chance of that! She relishes being the queen of the pureblood social circle. The Malfoys stumbling from grace was the best thing that ever happened in her book. Having Narcissa Malfoy at her beck and call instead of the other way around has been a dream come true."

Hermione forced herself out of bed. "Merlin, I hate your mother, Theo." She grabbed clean clothes out of her dresser and went into the bathroom, closing the door behind her.

Theo stared at the now closed door, the vision of her in her sleep shorts and camisole branded in his brain. He closed his eyes, easily imagining her sliding her shorts and panties down her creamy thighs. His hand slid under the waist band of his pajama bottoms and boxers as he imagined her top coming off next, exposing soft mounds of mouth-watering flesh with pert, pink nipples. Visualizing his hands on her skin and his mouth on her neck, he could almost taste her from memory alone. Theo languidly stroked himself as he imagined lifting her in his arms and her legs wrapping around his hips as he pressed her against the shower wall... water flowing over them as he sunk into her.

Hermione let the hot, steamy water wash over her in rivulets and felt her arousal build as she imagined strong hands on her hyper-aware skin. It wasn't her own hands cupping and massaging her breasts, but the attentive and demanding hands of the wizard who haunted her dreams and invaded her peace of mind. With her eyes closed, she pressed her back against the shower wall as she envisaged steel grey orbs staring down at her, her wrists pinned above her head as fingers tenderized the flesh between her legs. First one and then two fingers slid in

and out as she imagined teeth nibbling and plucking at her hard nipples. She could hear his whispered taunts. “Such a bad girl needs a proper fucking and a proper whipping.”

Her breath came in pants as she could feel his hardened length sliding into her and pounding her mercilessly. Fingers on her swollen clit brought her to the brink and whispered words commanding her to come pushed her over the edge. She slid to the shower floor, her legs too weak to support her body in her state of bliss as water continued to rain down on her. Her heart was still pounding after her climax had mercilessly finished and left her feeling alone. Opening her eyes, she only saw an empty shower stall with no Draco looking down on her as she so desperately longed. Gracelessly coming to stand, she found herself grateful she had given the shower floor a proper muggle cleaning the evening before.

Hermione arrived to work to find Lizzy had tea ready. The witches discussed their plan, and, because it was it was Friday, they agreed to call it an early day if possible. Hermione was in the throes of answering some owls when Lizzie walked into her office with an owl post that had just arrived. It bore the official Ministry seal and Hermione looked at her calendar suddenly fearing she had her days mixed up and had missed her court date. Nope, her court date was the following Thursday, June twelfth. Today was only Friday the sixth. She tore the note open, finding it was from Nelba Bittington.

Hermione,

Strange happenings at the Ministry this morning. A new schedule was just posted, and our case has been pushed back four weeks. New date is Thursday, July tenth. Not sure what is going on, but this is highly unusual. Will keep you posted.

Nelba

Hermione had her suspicions, and within five minutes was attaching the ‘Visitor’ badge to her robes as she rode the elevator down to sub-level eight, where the clerk offices for the Wizengamot were located.

Her hunch was confirmed when, as she exited the elevator, a smug looking Draco Malfoy was sauntering out of the scheduling clerk’s office. He didn’t see her as he headed for the express lift on the opposite side of the level. Steeling herself with a calming intake of air, she casually made her way into the schedulers office. Irritation mounted exponentially when she found the scheduler to be a young twenty-something witch with a dreamy far-away look on her face. Hermione noted the witch’s nameplate. *Petunia Everplease*. Hermione fought and almost lost the battle to not roll her eyes.

“Excuse me, Miss Everplease?”

The witch seemed to suddenly remember herself as she was jolted from her thoughts by Hermione’s words. Her eyes grew wide with recognition. “Mrs. Nott! Hello! What can I do for you?”

Hermione plastered as genuine a smile as she could muster. “I wonder if you can help me. My case seems to have been rescheduled and I’m curious as to why. Will I be receiving an official explanation from the Wizengamot?”

The witch looked slightly uncomfortable as comprehension was likely dawning. She opened her ledger and looked at Hermione in what was surely her most professional expression and posture. Hermione wasn't impressed. "What case would that be, Mrs. Nott?" Her look was just a tad too innocent for Hermione's liking.

"Case number 47893, formerly scheduled for next Thursday, now scheduled for four weeks later."

Hermione could tell the witch was only pretending to be searching her ledger. There was no question *little miss Petunia* knew exactly which case Hermione was referring to. It was likely lover boy Malfoy had just manipulated the young witch to his bidding with Merlin only knew what methods of persuasion.

"Ahh, yes. I see here the docket was changed to accommodate another larger case which needed to be moved to an earlier date. Your case was pushed back to allow for that accommodation."

Hermione pursed her lips. "I see, and what case was moved forward if I may ask?"

The witch seemed to ponder for a moment before responding. "A corporate case which involved a matter of patent theft and fraud."

"I see... and whom may I ask made the decision to make this change?"

The witch grew pink as she responded. "Well, that would be *my* job, Mrs. Nott."

"I see. I assume you are held to ethical and moral obligations for fairness of the scheduling and are not influenced in any way by personal interests or gain?"

The witch seemed to slump and crumble just a smidge before Hermione's eyes. "Of course not, Mrs. Nott." Her conviction did not match her words.

"I couldn't help but notice Draco Malfoy exiting your office only moments ago. I am wondering if perchance the change had something to do with a request of his? Does the case that's been pushed forward involve Malfoy Enterprises or one of its many subsidiaries?"

Seeing as the court schedule and docket were not confidential, Miss Everplease had no excuse to avoid answering. "Well, yes." Her confidence seemed to blossom, and she stood taller. "Mr. Malfoy spent a great deal of time with me this morning explaining the need for expediency of the case for his patent. While I am not at liberty to go into specifics, you may suffice it to say the patent case involves a product that will be very useful this winter and its release and sale will be delayed if this case isn't settled quickly."

"Well, perhaps I'll pay a visit to Mr. Malfoy myself. I guess it's safe to visit him now." Hermione couldn't resist continuing. 'It's just terrible what he's been through. I'm glad he's recovering from his latest nasty flare up of orifice munkulitus, which you know can be very uncomfortable and is *highly* contagious. From what I understand it makes it impossible to sit or bear any weight on your... well... you know.' Hermione smiled. "I'm sure he wouldn't be out in public if he wasn't in remission. It's a shame there isn't a cure. Ah well... things to do! Have a good day, Miss Everplease."

Yes, it was small and beneath her, but Hermione couldn't help the small gleam of satisfaction when the young witch paled and appeared rather panicked at Hermione's exiting

words. Hermione stepped into the elevator unable to contain a burst of giggles. There was no such thing as orifice munkulitis, but clearly Miss Everplease was none the wiser.

Saturday, June 7th

Theo's heart raced when Hermione stepped into the living room. Stunning was the word, well maybe stunning didn't do her justice. Perfection personified maybe? Goddess-like for sure. Her chestnut hair was silky straight and long down her back with occasional charmed golden strands intermixed. Her gown was a muggle design. A beautiful, rich-gold, in antique brocade with a sweetheart neckline and a small train at the back. Sophisticated, yet beautiful, in Gryffindor gold. He swallowed and tried to keep his cool façade in place. "You look beautiful, kitten."

Hermione smiled and charmed his bow-tie golden to match her dress. "Thanks, Theo. You look rather dashing yourself." And he did. Theo was a handsome wizard, but in dress robes, he was gorgeous. While she found him attractive and sexy, her heart just didn't race like it used to at the site of him. Theirs would only ever be a relationship of friendship, and she hoped it would last through the divorce and into the future.

They arrived at Ezmirelda's to find the event underway with a large turnout. The Nott matriarch glanced Hermione up and down appraisingly and, for the first time in seven years, Hermione smelt a whiff of approval from her bitch of a mother-in-law. She shouldn't have been surprised, it was the first time Hermione had spent a small fortune on a dress for the dreaded event. This was the first year Hermione felt herself needing to ingratiate herself to the hateful woman, so she had gone all out in an effort to impress.

However, if Hermione were truly honest with herself, the person she was really dressing for was not in her line of site. She felt certain he was there, she could practically feel his presence. She turned when she sensed a pull from behind her and froze when her eyes found his immediately. He was watching her, his expression flat but his intense stare proved he was riveted with her. Hermione found her eyes were glued to his as well, until a willowy and beautiful blonde returned to his side. His gaze left Hermione and he placed a hand on the witch's lower back, smiling at her softly and guiding her across the room.

Hermione could feel the color drain from her face and her knees went weak. Theo wrapped an arm around her waist. "Come, kitten. Let's get you a drink."

She felt sick. This was unbearable. Who was that witch? Were they dating? Was it serious? She hated feeling this way. She had told him to do what he needed to. If he needed to date — even if he just wanted to date — it was his right. It still sunk a knife into her heart.

She tried not to seek him with her eyes.

She tried not to think about him.

The attendance of the gala was perhaps it's highest ever. So many people around her made it impossible to see more than who was standing closest. Almost everyone in the magical community was there, including Harry, Ginny, Ron, Susan, Mr. and Mrs. Weasley, Fleur and Bill, Luna and Rolf, Neville and Hannah, the Shacklbolts.

Hermione did her best to seem engaged and interested but found her mind obsessively thinking about the blond wizard who was cozy and happy with another witch. After a

nonchalant — yet thorough — scanning of the room, she finally spotted them engaged in a conversation with the Shackebolts and was able to get a good look at the duo. Hermione tried not to be obvious as she took in the beautiful and stunning witch standing next to Draco and looking so comfortable on his arm. She was tall and thin with pale skin and her hair was a long, golden blonde. She had striking green eyes and she kept herself pressed up close to Draco. With more than a pang of jealousy, Hermione noticed Draco's hand casually stroking the woman's lower back, suggesting intimacy between them. Every now and then Hermione would catch Draco casting a glance her way, but for the most part it was as though she didn't exist. He had made no indication of approaching her or Theo, not that he would given the circumstances.

"Theo, darling. Please show the Selwyn's to the conservatory, will you? They've been asking to see the Lacewing Roses which are in bloom. I just can't step away."

Theo glanced at Hermione and then back at Ezmirelda. "Of course, Mother." He kissed Hermione on her forehead. "I'll be back shortly, love." Hermione and Theo were doing their best to act the part of a happily married couple. The hardest part was deceiving her friends. They didn't understand why she had gone back to Theo and she couldn't tell them the truth. She knew if she told them even a small piece of the story, Harry and Ron wouldn't give up until they had the whole of it. She couldn't bear that.

Ezmirelda kept her eyes on Hermione as Theo walked away in search of the Selwyn's. "Theo seems happy. I'm pleased you've been brought to heel." Hermione cringed at the sound of the hateful woman's voice. She wanted nothing more than to slap the superior look of condescension off the evil crow's face. "I require a grandchild, Hermione. The clock is ticking."

Ezmirelda turned away and greeted someone approaching from the right, her voice no longer menacing but sweet and endearing. "Narcissa, darling." Hermione watched as the ever graceful and beautiful Narcissa Malfoy greeted the devil incarnate. Ezmirelda smiled sweetly as she gestured towards Hermione. "Narcissa, you remember my daughter-in-law, Hermione?"

Narcissa smiled at Hermione. "Of course, delighted to see you again." Hermione smiled back politely, wondering if Narcissa was as evil as Ezmirelda. *Most likely*. Her thoughts immediately went back to Draco and was disappointed to realize that if she and Draco did work out, she would end up with in-laws who hated her... again. Only it would be two of them instead of one. The thought of Lucius Malfoy as a father-in-law was sobering.

Hermione sipped her champagne and politely excused herself, leaving the two pureblood matriarchs to themselves. She put down her empty glass and picked up a full one as she made for her escape from the throngs of people into the formal dining room and down the hall to the study. She let herself exhale with relief when she found the room empty. She crossed to the nearest bookshelf and started to finger the spines while reading the titles. After a moment of the comforting task, she finished her champagne in three deep swallows. She knew she was using alcohol to drown her feelings, but she wasn't sure what else to do. *How did everything get so fucked up?* She almost jumped when the cool familiar voice reprimanded her.

"Really, Granger? You do know you make *exceptionally* poor choices when you drink."

Hermione whirled in surprise and the hand not holding the champagne flute settled over her chest as she sucked in a deep breath. *Gods, he's bloody gorgeous*, was the only thought that filled her mind. This thought only served to infuriate her — she had to get over him. He was already “moving on”.

“What does it matter to you?” she muttered after a moment, turning back to the comfort of books. Pretending to lose herself in her distracting task, she proceeded to ignore Draco completely for a few minutes. The silence was so deep, however, she turned her face slightly to see if he hadn't left her alone.

He hadn't. Draco stood near the door, his hands shoved deep into the pockets of his dress robes. “What's that supposed to mean?” he said quietly when he caught her eye. Hermione turned to him fully before leaning back into the bookshelf and crossing her arms over her middle.

“Shouldn't you be concerned about *your* own date, not someone else's?” Her voice was venomous. She knew the accusation was childish, but the ache in her heart was starting to overwhelm her.

“Let's talk about something else.” Draco brushed off her statement with a small jerk of his head, releasing his hands from the confinement of his pockets. Hermione's eyes dropped away, which only highlighted her insecurities when it came to him. When she looked back up, he had crossed the room and stood only a few feet from her.

“Fine,” she spat, taking an involuntary step away. His nearness did things to her body she didn't want to think about right now. She just wanted to be mad at him. “How about you tell me why you pushed my court case back a month?”

A small smirk crossed Draco's face as he entered her personal bubble. She knew that he knew exactly what he was doing to her, which caused fury to claw up her chest cavity. “I knew it was you who did it,” her breathing had become erratic and she briefly closed her eyes. *Fuck, I've had too much to drink*. Her body started to tremble when she felt a light brush of fingers on her arm. She forced herself to look at him again and continued in what she hoped was an angry tone. “What? Worried I'm going to crush your precious company? I've already told you how to handle the PR. Malfoy Enterprises will come out smelling like a rose if you join me and don't fight me.” Hermione felt herself become more grounded. *Work... yes, focus on work*.

Steel eyes grazed down her form before moving back to her eyes. “I'm working on a different angle, pet. I need the extra time,” Draco drawled. He pressed his body closer to hers, effectively trapping her against the bookshelf. She could feel his arousal and see how dark his eyes had become.

“I'm not your pet,” she snarled waspishly, locking her whiskey colored eyes to his grey.

“I very much beg to differ.” Draco's tone had gone low and husky and dripped of promise and sex. It sent a pool of want low in her belly as it simultaneously brought tears to her eyes. She pushed at his chest, trying to force space between them. He took a step back and she ducked out from his grasp.

“I can't do this, Draco.” She hated the way her voice was trembling; she hated the way her throat was closing with tears. She was stronger than this. “Just go back to your *date*.”

“You have no right to be jealous!” The playful, sexy Draco evaporated in seconds. “I told you I wanted you. I asked you to walk away — you’re the one who chose to stay!”

“I — grarh! *I’m* the one who *chose* to stay? You know what? Fuck. Yo-ou!” she snarled, furious that a sob left with the last word. “I will not be taken down by that bitch for anyone — not even the great and powerful Draco Malfoy!”

“So just keep playing house with your cheater fucking husband. Sleep with him again for all I fucking care! Bear his spawn like the wicked witch wants of you! *Don’t* be surprised when I’m not there when your *sentence* is over!”

She flinched at his heat and anger and wrapped her arms around herself. “It’s getting better with Theo, Draco.” She spoke so softly that the room stilled around them. “He’s agreed to quit trying. I — I told him I love you and that I can *never* be with him again. He’s not trying to force anything anymore.” Hermione paused to take a deep, cleansing breath and used her fingertips to brush tears from under her eyes. She didn’t understand why she was crying — she was angry, not sad. Hermione looked up to him, noting his stiff posture and frozen features.

“He’s bullshitting,” Draco whispered. His face had gone blank and it was obvious he was trying to hide his emotions. ‘Don’t let your guard down!’ He started to reach for her, but stopped himself by shoving his hands back into his pockets. It was silent for a few long seconds and Hermione watched carefully as Draco forced his composure to calm. “Theodore Nott is the epitome of all things Slytherin. He’s manipulating you.”

She shook her head violently. “No. I believe him. It’s been... it’s been good the last week or so. He’s been... well, he’s been a friend to me, Draco.” She looked up at him, her eyes begging him to understand. ‘We’re working together better than we have in years.’ She sighed when a flash of pain sliced Draco’s features. “We are *not* together Draco. I’ve already said it once during this conversation — I love *you*. He — he’s helping me get out from under Ezmirelda. He’s going to make it look like the divorce is what he wants.” She swallowed heavily and continued. “He thinks... he thinks that if Ezmirelda thinks it is for his own happiness and that *he* is the one who wants the divorce... he thinks she’ll give in. Draco, don’t you see? It can all still work out with his help!”

Draco’s composure cracked again, and he crossed the small space between them in two long strides, grasping both her shoulders in his long-fingered hands. She gasped in surprise with the force of the motion. “Hermione!” he implored her desperately. ‘Please!’ His eyes were wide and frightened and full of a longing that was breathtaking. “Don’t let him suck you back in. He is *playing* you!”

Hermione tried shrugging out of his grasp and sucked in another pained breath when his fingers tightened even more. “Draco,” she hissed. “You’re *hurting* me!”

A throat clearing caused Draco to drop his bruising grip and take a hasty step away from her.

“Theo!” Hermione’s voice sounded guilty to her own ears, which made her wince.

“Are you all right, Hermione?” Theo’s voice was calm and kind and caused Draco’s eyebrows to disappear into his hairline with his surprise.

"Y-yes," she replied, glancing between the two men even as she raised her hands to opposite arms and chaffed her skin, attempting to bring some warmth to her suddenly ice-cold extremities.

"Do you need some time alone?" Theo cocked his head inquiringly and Draco silently fumed when Hermione sent Theo a sweet, thankful smile.

"I think we're done here, actually," she answered him softly.

"Like hell we are!" Draco snapped. He had to bite his tongue when the glare she sent him almost ignited the bookshelf behind him.

"I say we're done." It was a simple, clipped statement. It's temperature cool and unfeeling. Her passion of just moments before had evaporated.

Theo looked from Hermione to Draco and back again. "Okay everybody, just calm down," he said in a calm voice of reason. He stepped towards Hermione, giving her a reassuring nod.

An incredulous look crossed Draco's face as he looked from Theo to Hermione before he closed his eyes and ran his hands through his hair. He let out a grunt of frustration. "Ahh... well played, Theo buddy. The concerned and supportive husband at his wife's side." His tone was harsh and conveyed the distrust he held for his former friend.

Theo looked at Draco innocently and held his hands up. "Draco... *buddy*." His tone was mocking. He let out a sigh and took a breath. 'Listen, this sucks! This entire *fucking* situation sucks. But she loves you. Merlin knows *why*, but she does.' Theo looked down at Hermione and his eyes softened. He continued in a soft voice. "For her sake... for *her* sake... I'm letting her go." His voice sounded resigned. "I owe her... I owe her her happiness." He looked back at Draco. "But one fucking step out of line and I'm coming for you... *buddy*."

Hermione felt warmth and affection for Theo as he looked back at her and smiled softly.

Draco scoffed at the exchange and the naïve belief on Hermione's face. Anger roiled in his stomach and burned up his esophagus spewing the angry retort out of his mouth. "Hermione, you are a *fool* to believe him." His tone was pleading, and her eyes met his with barely concealed frustration as he continued. He stepped towards her and spoke softly and clearly. "Hermione, pet... please! See this for what it *truly* is! A last-ditch effort to save his marriage. I *guarantee* you that he has no intention whatsoever of letting you go! Please... wake up!"

Theo stepped closer to Hermione and spoke softly yet sternly to Draco. "No, Drake. My marriage is over. She doesn't love me anymore and as hard as that is for me to admit and accept, I have no choice. I am not playing a game. All I want is her happiness and that means I need to do all I can to help her escape from my mother's grasp." He looked down at Hermione to find her trusting eyes following his declaration filled with warmth and appreciation and dare he think it... affection? He internally rejoiced as he continued his manipulative plea. "So... you can continue to be an ass and parade around with other witches, or you can support this woman whom you claim to care about and give us the time we need to get this sorted out."

Draco's look was venomous. "You know what? Fuck this... I don't need this shit."

Hermione felt her stomach drop to the floor as Draco cut Theo a scathing look before throwing her a look of pity and storming out of the study.

Hermione's dress: remove spaces:

[www . modaoperandi romona-keveza-fw17/strapless-antique-brocade-gown](http://www.modaoperandi.com/romona-keveza-fw17/strapless-antique-brocade-gown)

Authors Note : We know it seems like Hermione is being frustratingly naive again. You will see in the next chapter that she isn't.

Chapter 30

AN: Sorry for the hiatus! Lissadream and I have been focusing on Master Mine for the past couple months, but are thrilled to finally get back to The Affair. Thanks for your encouragement and your patience! For those of you reading Master Mine, our next chapter will be posted within the next few days.

We greatly appreciate all reviews, favs and follows.

It was after midnight when Hermione and Theo finally made it home from the Gala and Hermione could not have felt more miserable. She was tired and cranky and her headache from earlier had come back in full force. She collapsed onto the sofa and kicked off her heels as the cushioning charm on her shoes had long worn off and she had been too preoccupied with Draco to notice. Now she was paying the price. She groaned with relief as she rubbed first her right foot and then her left, focusing on her arches.

She had never enjoyed large social functions and over the years had sent more regrets than acceptances as RSVP's to such events. Tonight's Gala had been the epitome of why she didn't like them — the night had been long and the event had been loud. Hermione hated feeling obligated to socialize and engage with people she hardly knew and what's more, had no desire to know. To add insult to injury, seeing Draco had not gone as she had hoped. After their disagreement, he had spent the remainder of the night determinedly ignoring her.

Unwilling to let things lie as they had been left, Hermione had waited for the right opportunity to make her move. It had come an hour or so later, after the muggle-born names had been drawn and announced. Draco was standing by one of the refreshment tables, finally free of the praying mantis that had practically been latched onto him all night, when Hermione nonchalantly made her way to the table next to him. Pretending to be focused on the platters of food before them, Hermione whispered just loud enough for him to hear, "Please trust me. I told you before I would let you handle everything if after six months things didn't work out. I still stand by that." She looked up and around the room nonchalantly before placing a shrimp on a napkin. She leaned close to him, reaching for a carrot stick and added, "If you still want to wait for me, that is." She swallowed heavily and had to conceal tears as she emotionally choked out in a whisper, "I love you, Draco."

She hadn't waited for a response, knowing she needed to rein in her emotions and get control of herself. Before he could say anything, she quickly turned away, took a calming breath and headed back to Theo's side, handing him the shrimp and the carrot. She couldn't eat if her life depended on it. She had smiled and nodded and tried to appear engaging, all while feeling like she was about to have a breakdown. It was five minutes later that she spotted Draco leaving with his date.

Looking back, she didn't regret her words. She didn't want to play games and she hated how the conversation had turned in the study. Telling him she loved him had been the right thing to do. What she regretted was her inability to keep a calm façade. She was normally a

strong person emotionally, but she felt like she cried at the drop of a hat these days. Yes, her heart was breaking, but that was no reason to wear it on her sleeve. She was made of stronger stuff and needed to maintain better control of herself. Hopefully no one at the party was the wiser, except Draco and Theo, of course.

She slid out of her dress and hung it with a flick of her wand. Snapping her garter belt hooks, she slid down her silk stockings and draped them over the chair before removing the belt and her bra. Still in her lacy thong, she was slipping on her shorts and had just picked up her camisole when she felt a pull. She turned around to find Theo leaning on the door frame watching her, intensely. She turned away and slipped on the cami as he whispered, “Are you ok?” His voice sounded raspy and he cleared his throat. “Can I get you anything?”

Hermione couldn’t help but feel uneasy. Perhaps he had just walked up to the door, but Hermione had the feeling Theo had been watching her undress before she noticed him. “Not really and no,” she responded before stepping into the bathroom and closing the door behind her. She leaned against the bathroom door, glad to have some distance. She would make a point of changing in the bathroom when Theo was home going forward. He might be resigned to their divorce, but he still harbored feelings for her and prancing around naked in front of him was hardly advisable. She moved towards the sink to wash her face and brushd her teeth. When she stepped back into the room, Theo was in bed reading. She walked around to her side and climbed in.

“Do you want to talk about it?” Theo was looking at her with what appeared to be genuine concern.

Hermione stared at him for a minute before fluffing her pillow and responding with well thought out words. “Theo, Draco is *convinced* you are playing the Slytherin and are manipulating me.” When he opened his mouth to speak, she held up her hand to stop him. ‘Just, listen to me. I need you to *really* hear me. I will *never* come back to you. Ever. You need to understand that, because if... Merlin forbid, Draco is right? And you are lying to me and not helping me with your mother? You will lose my friendship and every ounce of remaining respect and love I have for you.’ Her expression matched her stern words. Then her eyes softened. “Please don’t do that to us, Theo. I’d hate to lose you entirely. The past week has been... nice, but we will never be more than what we are now. Tell me you understand.”

Theo nodded lightly and responded with what appeared to be heartfelt sincerity. “Yes, Hermione. I understand. I don’t want to lose your friendship and I would not betray you for anything. I truly only want you to be happy. I owe you this, kitten.”

She reached out and touched his forearm, squeezing it. “Good. Thank you, Theo. You are important to me and I would be very sad to lose your friendship.” Collapsing back on her pillow, she lay on her back and closed her eyes. “These headaches I’ve been getting lately are brutal.”

“Can I get you a potion?”

“I’m hoping I can fall asleep without it. I’ve been using the potions a lot lately. That can’t be good for me.” She yawned as she flicked her wand at her bedside lamp, turning out the light. “Goodnight, Theo.”

“Goodnight.” Theo watched Hermione as she rolled, facing away from him. His confidence from her defense of him to Draco earlier was all but evaporated. Turning out his own lamp, he fluffed his pillow and rolled to his side away from her. Her words had struck him, and it was painful. He hated to acknowledge she would never want him back. The truth was he just couldn’t believe that. She still loved him and even if it was only in friendship he knew they could build on that. It would just take time. He still had five months after all.

In the meantime, he would keep his word as far as his mother was concerned. He would have to handle her carefully. Ezmirelda was not easy to manipulate, but he knew that he was the center of her world and if he could convince her that he had fallen out of love with Hermione, perhaps she would back off. It wouldn’t be easy. The woman did not believe in divorce and felt it was a shameful stain on a family’s good name. It would take some heavy persuasion on his part. Having five months to accomplish it would help. He looked back at Hermione. He would keep his word, but he would not give up. He would plan for the worst and hope for the best.

Hermione swore as she wiped at the sputtered tea on the front of her dress. Her wipes became more aggressive as she found her eyes drawn once again to the picture on the front of the Daily Prophet. The golden-haired witch looked blissfully happy as she bestowed a wink and a gleaming smile on the camera man. The moving photograph continued to wink over and over again, perpetually mocking Hermione. The white-blond wizard next to the beautiful witch was less than interested in the camera and was looking straight ahead, his hand guiding his companion forward. The caption underneath the photo was simple, inflicting a quick and effective jab at Hermione’s heart. “*Draco Malfoy, once again, on the arm of Swedish socialite and model, Anna Hellström.*”

Hermione chided herself for her reaction. She should be used to it by now. Photos of the pair had been gracing the social section of the paper for the past two weeks, ever since Draco had brought the witch to the Gala. However, this was only the second time their photo had graced the front page. The first had been the day after the Gala. In that edition, several photographs of attendees at the soiree had made the cover, Draco and Anna simply among many others.

Unable to stop herself, she began to read the accompanying article:

Billionaire and former bad boy, Draco Malfoy, was once again spotted leaving Malfoy Enterprises at the close of business yesterday with the same companion he has been photographed with multiple times lately. While neither have answered questions, or been forthcoming about their relationship, it does not take a genius to realize love is in the air, or certainly lust. Practically glued at the hip these past two weeks, it begs common sense that more is simmering in their cauldron than a simple Sleekeazy’s Hair Potion. It is quite obvious....

A soft and strong hand placed reassuringly on her shoulder pulled Hermione’s focus from the tortuous article.

“Kitten, perhaps you should avoid the Prophet until this is no longer news.”

Hermione cringed. He said it as though it *was* news, which gave the photo meaning. Hermione wanted it to mean nothing... to *not* be news worthy, but clearly it was. And, when it was no longer news, would it be because it was old news and they were an official couple? Or, would it no longer be news because they were never news to begin with? *Dear Merlin, please let that be the case!* For the first time in her life, Hermione wished she had perhaps taken divination more seriously. A crystal ball would be most helpful right now.

Hermione grabbed the paper and tossed it into the trash resignedly before looking up at him. "Yes, I suppose you're right. I had really thought after the Gala, after... well, never mind." She thought back to the last words she had spoken to Draco; her declaration of love. There had been no response, no owl or visit. Her only visible response was daily photographs of him with this other witch. If the articles were true, she was a witch of some means with a successful modeling career and estates scattered throughout the world. She made a lot of Galleons, but she came from money as well. Hermione was loath to admit how perfect Draco likely found her. His parents would certainly approve of the match.

Theo paused, as though trying to find the right words. "I had thought he would wait for you as well. Judging by his behavior that night and his condemnation of my attempt at friendship, I really thought he was laying claim to you. I mean, why would he care about *our* relationship if he was interested in another witch?"

Hermione couldn't deny the painful truth of Theo's words. Perhaps her admitted rekindled friendship with Theo had been the final straw. Perhaps Draco felt he simply couldn't trust Hermione. She had told him she didn't love Theo like that anymore... that she loved him. Draco had been so adamant that Theo was playing her. Did Draco think Hermione was stupid? Did Draco honestly think she would allow herself to be manipulated into the arms of Theo? Perhaps her faith in Theo is what pushed Draco away. All Hermione wanted was to have an amicable divorce and if possible, remain friends with Theo when it was all said and done. How was that different from Draco's relationship with Astoria? Besides, she needed to keep in Theo's good graces so that he would help her.

Theo shook his head as he sipped his coffee. "But then again, Draco *can* be rather fickle." He said the words in passing as if they were of little consequence while he placed his cup in the dishwasher. The words were of no small consequence to Hermione, however. They shook her greatly. *Was Draco fickle?* Hermione honestly didn't know. Theo knew Draco better than practically anyone. If he said it, it was likely true. However, a part of her knew better than to trust Theo when it came to Draco. She was not so naïve as to believe her husband didn't harbor some hope she would change her mind about their relationship. Tossing little comments here and there to further alienate her from Draco emotionally would, in his mind, certainly be to his advantage. She had to remember Theo lied to her for five years, it would be foolish to trust him completely.

Forcing herself to put it out of her mind, Hermione stood from the breakfast table and placed her cup in the dishwasher. Theo grinned at her as his eyes glanced at her chest. "Sometimes I think you forget you are a witch." He waved his wand and muttered a spell which pulled all remnants of the tea from the front of her dress.

Hermione smiled up at him, the words spilling from her mouth as though they were the most natural response. "Well, that's why I have you. To remind me." The minute the words passed her lips, Hermione felt herself flush. She hadn't meant that the way it sounded.

Theo shrugged and smiled. "It's ok, Kitten. I know what you meant."

Hermione shook her head as she patted his arm and walked past him, "I need to get to work."

Theo watched her retreating form and felt his day could not have started any better. The private eye he had hired to tail Draco had kept Theo promptly informed of the times Draco was with Anna. It was nothing for Theo to then send an anonymous tip to Rita Skeeter informing the gossip queen of Draco's whereabouts and the company he was keeping. Like clockwork, a photo would appear in either the morning or evening edition of the paper. Theo had no idea what Draco's intentions were towards this other witch, it could all be benign, but it was working to Theo's advantage. He was doing his best to keep the story in the news and the photo opportunities abundant.

Hermione arrived at work to the surprise of Moxie sitting on the lobby sofa waiting for her. She promptly invited the goblin inside and poured them each a cup of tea before Moxie got straight to the point. "I no longer wish to be part of your Wizengamot case."

Hermione was sure she had heard incorrectly. "What?"

"Malfoy Enterprises contacted me and offered me the head accountant position of their department store, *Malfoys*. It pays the same and has the same benefits as the position I was passed over for. They explained that they had regretted the other position didn't work out but that they hoped I would consider this one instead. I accepted and have no wish to strain my relationship with my new employer in any way."

Hermione sat stunned but didn't say anything. The goblin went on to say, "I thank you for your assistance and taking on my plight. I'll bid you a good day."

Hermione was barely cognizant of the goblin standing and leaving her office. She sat stunned, suddenly understanding why Draco needed more time and had manipulated the docket at the Ministry. Her head began to pound once again and that familiar feeling of exhaustion began to reclaim her. The stress in her life had really been taking its toll these past few weeks.

As the shock began to ebb, fury began to build. She felt her heart start to thrum and heat washed through her. "Arse!" she spat to herself as she grabbed her purse and slammed her desk drawer closed. "You may be able to fuck with my heart, Draco Malfoy but you will not fuck with my case." She marched out of her office, and announced in passing, "I'm going out Lizzy."

Arriving at Malfoy Enterprises ten minutes later, Hermione headed directly for the executive elevator. A security wizard with a pleasant expression blocked her path. "Miss, do you have business with a Malfoy executive? Do you have a pass?"

Trying to maintain her calm, she gave the portly, balding man a confident stare. "I absolutely have business and no, I do not have a pass."

The wizard must have recognized her because he visibly cowed and shuffled his feet. "I'm terribly sorry, but without a pass I can't let you on the elevator. New rules." His tone seemed

genuine, as though he were truly sorry he had to deny her anything. She determined then and there she would not take out her frustration on this man who was simply doing his job.

Looking at his name badge she tried to appear calm. "Milton, perhaps you could tell me how to go about obtaining a pass?" Her mind was already exploring other ways to get up to the ferret. Despite her fear of flying, she was not opposed to acquiring a broom so that should could simply fly up to Draco's window and blast her way in with a well-placed Reducto.

"Yes, ma'am. Well, you just need to go to the main desk in the lobby and Eliza will assist you." He led her to the desk where a young raven-haired witch with entirely too big of a smile greeted her. "Eliza here will help you." He gave Hermione a small smile and walked back to his post.

"Welcome to Malfoy Enterprises. How may I be of assistance?"

Hermione turned her focus to the overly cheery witch. "I need to speak with Draco Malfoy about an urgent matter."

Eliza's eyes lit up in surprise. "Oh! Is he expecting you?"

Hermione's voice shook with barely contained frustration as she tried to maintain her calm. "No, but it's imperative that I speak with him."

Eliza's bright smile didn't falter. "Ah, I see. Well, Miss, Mr. Malfoy is a very busy man and you can't just walk in and expect him to drop everything to meet with you. I'm sorry to disappoint. I realize he's a handsome and fascinating wizard but if he interrupted his day to meet with every young woman who walked in here asking..."

Losing her patience, Hermione interrupted the irritating witch. "Eliza, please stop talking and listen to me. I am not some bimbo fan witch. I have urgent business and I need..."

Eliza's focus moved to behind Hermione and her face flushed with a beet red blush.

A teasing voice from behind revealed the catalyst for Eliza's reaction. "Granger, what are you doing here? Come to harass my staff again?"

Eliza's face fell, and the irritating smile finally washed off her face as the billionaire's focus was not on her, but on the witch in front of her.

Hermione whipped around to face him. "Presently I think you're the only one I want to harass. You are sucking the wind out of with my case, Malfoy! Suddenly hiring Moxie!"

He shrugged as though bored and looked around the room. "Oh that. Well, we had something come available we felt she was perfect for."

"Bullshit, Draco. You're trying to sabotage my case, but I'm here to tell you it won't work."

Seeming to find humor in her anger, Draco gave her a condescending smirk. "Really. Well, let's move this to my office, shall we?"

"You know what? No! I don't think I need to speak with you after all." She started to step around him. "There are other employees we can use as examples. This case is..."

Suddenly a firm grip grasped her upper arm and she felt herself pressed back against Eliza's counter. His lips brushed her ear as his whispered aggressive words caused her heart to flutter. "No. You are going to follow me to my office right now and we are going to have a nice little chat."

When she tried to pull her arm away his grip became tighter. "You think I won't force you?"

She swallowed as heat pooled in her belly.

"I am going to drop your arm and you are going to accompany me. Do I make myself clear?"

Damn him! She wanted to refuse, she wanted to resist him and walk away, but she couldn't. She wasn't physically or emotionally able to deny him. She knew she was weak and her anger only grew because of it. "Fine," she spat.

"Manners, Pet." He rebuked in a whisper as he pulled away.

She took a breath and drew herself up to her full height and tipped her chin up as she followed him. Casting a glance at the young witch behind her, Hermione couldn't help the small thrill of victory at the shocked look on Eliza's face.

Milton gave her a small smile as she and Draco approached the executive elevator. Draco tapped his wand to the lift button and gave Hermione a questioning look as he caught her returning Milton's smile.

Giving Draco a pointed look she responded simply. "Milton is a very efficient employee, Draco. Nice to know there is at least *one* gentleman under ME's roof." Just then the elevator door opened, and Hermione threw Milton a wink as she stepped inside beside Draco.

As soon as the door closed, Draco was on her. His hips pinned her against the wall as his lips glanced her neck. His hands were braced against the wall on either side of her head. His words were sultry and teasing. "You don't think I'm a gentleman?" He planted a soft kiss on her throat and continued to nuzzle her.

"Hmpf. You are a sneaky, conniving little snake, Draco and are *hardly* a gentleman!" Bringing her hands to the lapels of his suit, she smoothed her hands over him before giving a forceful shove, causing him to stumble back.

He was back on her instantly, this time pinning her wrists above her head and pressing himself more forcefully into her. "Well, I would venture you have no use for *Gentlemen* anyway." His eyes were on hers and were burning with intensity.

"Get off me!" She stomped her foot.

"No!"

"Dammit, Malfoy!"

"Fine!" He pushed away and turned away from her. The door opened just then and he stepped out, still not looking at her.

Feeling defiant, she stayed on the lift, contemplating just leaving.

His hands on his hips, he cocked a look over his shoulder, giving her an impatient glare. “Granger, just.... Are you *seriously* going to leave?”

Letting out a huff of impatience she stepped off the lift and followed behind him as he made his way through the executive suite. His secretary shot Hermione a curious look as they walked past her desk and into his office. There was an audible click as the door was closed and the lock was latched with a flick of his wrist.

“You want a drink?” He asked as he walked towards the bar.

“No. Thanks.” She watched him as he shrugged off his jacket and tossed it on a chair before pouring two glasses of water.

He walked back towards her and handed her one. “I think we both need a little cooling off.”

Still furious with him, she tossed the water from her glass in his face, drenching him. “There, better?” She gave him a teasing, self-satisfied hint of a smile and turned away to walk towards his sofa.

She should have known better than to turn her back on him. He whispered, “*Incarcerous*,” and instantly thin cords were around her, pinning her arms to her sides with her wand still up her sleeve where she couldn’t get to it. She could move her legs but had no use of her arms or hands. She cursed herself for her stupidity.

He stepped up behind her and gently removed the now empty glass from her grasp. “I want you to have a seat and calm. the. fuck. down.” She shrieked when he easily picked her up and tossed her back down on a chair. She could hear him walk away and open a door. After a few seconds he walked back in front of her, slipping on a pressed and dry dress shirt. She had forgotten he had a full closet off his office. He tussled his wet hair as though he had just stepped out of the shower. Hermione cursed her body for becoming aroused. His chest was still exposed as he had yet to button up the shirt.

Sitting on the sofa across from her he spoke calmly. “Now, lets start over, shall we?” When she said nothing and only continued to glare at him he continued. “Malfoy Enterprises has revisited its hiring practices because, as you so justly pointed out, we were perhaps being slightly and *unintentionally* prejudiced in our hiring. We are working on rectifying that. We have initiated culture sensitivity training across the board. Over the next six months this training will be mandatory for all of Malfoy Enterprises employees as well as the employees of its subsidiaries. In short, I want ME represented in your case as the company of the future. Malfoy Enterprises is no longer the example of bad hiring practices, but the initiator and example of what is right.”

Hermione continued to stare, her mind spinning with his words. She remembered she had given him the advice to do this very thing. Only she had intended it to happen in a different sequence. She had planned to win her case by touting ME as a prime example of the problem. Malfoy could then hold a press conference commending her case and thanking her for bringing this important issue to light. He would at that time announce reforms in hiring practices and at that time become the leader and initiator for other firms to follow suit. He wasn’t supposed to do all this *before* her case!

He had stopped talking and she continued to watch him. Before she could stop herself, unplanned words spewed without her permission. "Are you in love with that... Anna person, Draco?" Hermione hated how vulnerable her voice sounded but she desperately needed to know.

He watched her for a few seconds and then he looked as if he had finally solved a puzzle. "Ahh, I see. That's what your little tantrum is *really* about, isn't it?"

She closed her eyes, sounding resigned to hear the words that would break her heart. "Just tell me, Draco."

He waved his wand and her bindings disappeared. He spoke softly. "Come here."

"No," she pouted.

He smiled lightly. "I'm not gonna lie, I like your jealousy. It better explains this little display of yours this morning, pet."

She didn't say anything.

"Come here." He whispered again.

"I don't want to," she whispered in return.

"Yes, you do. Come here." He patted his lap.

His eyes were soft and yearning and she found herself utterly desperate for him.

"Just come here, please?" He whispered, his voice sounding more raw and desperate. Unable to resist, she stood and walked towards him. When she was close, he grabbed her, and she slid onto his lap. His strong arms wrapped around her, holding her tight. "I told you, you're the only witch for me."

Relief flooded through her and all the tension and fear and desperation she had felt and kept bottled up over the past few weeks erupted from her chest into a sob. "I thought... I thought... oh, God." Her words became incoherent as the one shuddering sob exploded into full blown bawling against his chest.

She took hiccupping, gasping breaths as the sobs poured out of her. She pulled herself into a small ball on his lap and he began to rock her, tenderly. "Hey, hey. Look at me."

After a second, she peeked up at him. His eyes were moist as he dabbed her face with the linen handkerchief in his hand. "You never had anything to worry about, Hermione. Anna is a distant cousin, pet; on my father's side. She's part of the French branch of the family but was born and grew up in Sweden. She lived in Russia and then Paris for a while because of her modeling. But that's done now, and she reached out to father. She wants to reconnect with her roots. She wants to live here. She's quite brilliant actually and has just completed her graduate education. She's going to be taking over the running of Malfoys department store. She's actually part of the reason Moxie was hired to run the accounting department. Anna has a smart head for business and when I told her about Moxie's situation, she was quite keen to bring her on board." Draco huffed out a laugh. "Who knew goblins were a part of the fashion industry, but apparently they very much are. Their skill with jewels and metals carries over into a skill with many textiles apparently and they are quite talented with silks and finer

fabrics. Anyhow, she is used to being around Goblins and understands their nature and insisted Moxie would be an exceptional hire.”

Hermione was quiet, absorbing his words. “But the pictures in the paper, the articles and the way she was latching onto you at the Gala, I thought...”

“It’s really weird how I can be out doing any number of things with any number of people, but the minute I’m with her, a photographer inevitably shows up. She’s just my cousin, Hermione. And yes, technically she is distant enough to marry, but I have no interest in her in that way. As far as the party? She had just moved to London and was feeling a bit overwhelmed. English is not her primary language and while she speaks it quite well, she kept close to me or mother all night. She’s a touchy type of person, but it was in no way meant sexually.”

Her hands began to play with his shirt. “I’ve missed you so much, Draco.”

He breathed her in at the neck. “You’re all I think about, pet.”

“But you haven’t contacted me, you haven’t said anything.”

“Ahh, but you see, you haven’t contacted me either now have you? I was simply doing as you requested. I was leaving you alone so that Theo would help you.”

“Do you believe me now? That Theo *is* going to help with Ezmirelda and that he *is* going to let me go?”

Draco let out a heavy sigh. “I believe that *you* believe him. I respect you and will give you the remaining time in your... sentence to stay with him. But when those six months are up? What is it... four and a half months left?”

“Yes, four and a half more months of missing you so much it hurts.”

His words were firm. “When that time is up, and he goes against his word or Ezmirelda does not come around, I’m going to take the situation over, pet. I’m going to hold you to your word. You will do as I say.” He tilted her chin up and gave her a stern look. “Understand?”

“Yes... sir.” She couldn’t help her response. She was on fire and the tone of his words matched with his promise to take over and to take control caused her body to go into auto pilot. She knew what her response would do to him and was not disappointed when he growled and began to harden underneath her bum.

His words were rushed and urgent, almost angry. “Has he touched you? Hemione? Have his hands or his cock been inside of you?”

“No! Of course not!”

She could feel his breath quickening against her cheek. “Will you give yourself to me? Here, now? Just... this once. Submit yourself to my will to do as I please?”

Her heart and her body raged war against her head and her integrity. She had made a promise to Theo. However, what he didn’t know wouldn’t hurt him. She would shower and then work late. She had no choice but to work late. Her case would have to be re-worked. But right now? Here? Her wizard needed her, and she needed him.

Her words were shaky, “Yes, yes... I’m yours.”

“Straddle me,” he commanded.

She stood up and lifted her skirt before climbing back on his lap and resting her knees on the sofa on either side of his thighs. Strong hands encased her face and his lips met hers with urgency. His tongue traced her lower lip demanding entry and she opened her mouth to him. A soft whimper escaped her as his hands ran up and down her back undoing the zipper of her dress. He gripped the fabric that was bunched around her waist and pulled it up over her head, leaving her in her simple white bra and cotton panties.

“You should be in nothing but the finest silks and lace, love. When you are mine, it’s all I’ll allow.”

She giggled into his neck, “Clearly I wasn’t anticipating seeing you today, much less getting naked.”

“Ohh, Pet, you are going to do sooo much more than merely get naked.” He snapped his fingers one time and she froze. Her head pulled back and she met his eyes. He was smirking and shook his head. “Forgotten already, I see.”

“Draco, that was *months* ago! I don’t remember all those positions? One snap means this and two snaps means that? I mean... honestly!”

He threw her a teasing smile. “Clearly, we don’t have time to revisit all that today. But we will. Trust me. Eventually those commands will be like second nature.” He grinned wider. “Next time we review them I’ll insist you take notes.”

Hermione’s jaw fell. She remembered how infuriated she got with him the more he had made her practice. She would NOT need to take notes! It was merely because it had been so long ago that she had forgotten.

He laughed at her look of indignation. “You’re adorable when you get pissy, you know that?”

“So glad that I amuse you,” she quipped.

“Yes, amuse me you do, love.” His eyes raked down her front as his hands began to fondle her breasts. ‘You have delicious tits, pet.’ His eyes shot up to hers. “Take that awful bra off.”

Reaching behind herself she unlatched the bra and tossed it aside. She was surprised to find his steel orbs still on hers instead of her now bare chest. “I’ve missed your beautiful eyes, Hermione.” The words were said with such warmth and tenderness that Hermione shivered despite being on fire.

She whispered in response as her hands gently stroked his cheeks. “Your eyes, your mouth, your words... they’ve all haunted my dreams, Draco. When I... when I’m in the shower, I’ll close my eyes and imagine you’re there. I...”

His hands began to massage her breasts and he flicked her hardened peaks as he whispered, “Go on, tell me more.”

She sucked her bottom lip into her mouth and then released it. “You’re... demanding and your hands are on me.”

“Where?”

“On my breasts, my neck, my...”

One hand grasped the back of her neck, dominantly as the other kneaded her right breast. “Like this?”

She threw her head back, “Oh Gods, yes, like that.”

“But that’s not all I touch is it?”

“You grab my bum and pull me close as another hand snakes down between my legs.” Hermione’s eyes were closed as she recounted the fantasy that had driven her to orgasm in the shower multiple times over the past several weeks. ‘You scoop my thighs up over your forearms and lift me, pressing my back into the cool tile of the shower wall.’ Hermione swallowed as she panted. “Then you thrust into me... you fuck me so hard. I take my hand and stimulate myself and then... then I shudder my release and...” She opened her eyes and stared into his. “Then I open my eyes to find I’m alone and its jarring. The loneliness... your absence. What always starts out feeling so good, leaves me lost and empty when it’s over.”

One hand was rubbing her mound over her panties and the other was stroking her skin on her chest to her abdomen and then back up to her cheek where he leaned in and kissed her.

Suddenly he stood, lifting her. Her legs automatically wrapped around him as he carried her urgently into the en suite off his office. He flicked his wand causing the shower to come on, instantly hot. He knelt before her and slipped down her panties before pressing his nose into the apex of her thighs and taking a deep breath to draw in her sweet, musky scent. “Get in,” he demanded as he stood and removed his shirt and pulling his trousers and boxers off in a flash.

Hermione stepped into the large shower and under the hot water spray. He was upon her quickly, pressed up against her, his erection pressing into her back. She leaned back into him, moaning in delight at the feel of her skin against his. He was almost as warm as the water pouring down on them.

“I’m going to fuck you, just like in your fantasy... against the tile wall... fast and hard. Then I’m going to fuck you like in mine — slowly and deliberately before massaging that tasty little cunt of yours with my tongue until you scream.”

Hermione sat at her desk three hours later. Her quim still throbbing from the repeated assault of his cock and his mouth. He had taken her no less than five times, an invigoration drought needed for the fourth and fifth round. He wanted to take her again, but she refused. She had to get back to work.

Before she left his office, he insisted she let him help her with her Wizengamot case. He wanted to be part of the team and wanted ME to be represented as part of the solution as a wizarding company ahead of the others. He said he would endorse her proposed legislation and push for it to pass with all the political clout that he could muster. She would have to abandon her plan to subjugate ME as a company with bad hiring practices, but he would allow her to say ME had *in the past* made some *unintentional* poor decisions as long as she

would say that ME is currently the embodiment of what she hoped legislation would require of all businesses going forward.

The truth was that without Moxie, her original game plan could falter and she held little confidence her proposed legislation would have a chance. She really didn't feel she had a choice but to bring him on board. She owed Theo, letting him know she would be late, and started to outline new arguments and talk points she would need to use.

It was after one in the morning when she finally made it home and she was shocked to find Theo sitting up and waiting for her in the living room. Not sure why he was still awake, and fearing he knew what she had been up to, she hesitantly approached him and sat on the sofa.

After a moment, he put his book down. "Long day, huh?"

He did not seem angry and she exhaled a small breath of relief. "Yeah. Moxie came to see me this morning. She no longer wants to be part of the case. Malfoy, he offered her a job and now she doesn't want to make waves with her new employer."

"And I take it that's why you went to his office today? And spent almost four hours?"

Hermione looked at him, stunned. "You're still having me followed?"

"Never stopped, love."

"But... why?"

"Honestly, I forgot you were being followed. I hadn't been contacted by him in several weeks because you hadn't seen Draco. So imagine my surprise when today I got an urgent owl message saying that you went to see him. Angry, by the looks of it... the note said. I guess it makes sense. You would be quite justified to be mad that Moxie abandoned your case and it would explain your need to see Draco."

"Oh well, I'm glad my explanation meets your nosy approval. I can't believe you, Theo! You need to stop having me followed. It's downright creepy."

"You know what the next owl message said? The message that came over four hours later?"

"No Theo, but I'm sure you are going to tell me."

"It said you left in a much better mood and that you looked very put together. Your hair was a lot less messy and your dress had less wrinkles than it had when you arrived. You see these are the kinds of things a private investigator is paid to notice."

"Theo, it's obvious what you think and what you are insinuating." Hermione cringed at how easily the lie fell from her lips. 'I promised you I would not have sex with Draco and I am keeping that promise.' His look remained impassive. "Theo, I was furious. Beyond enraged. I went there to yell at him... and I did. But then he explained why he did it and in hindsight I should have predicted that this was what he would do. He wants to be brought in on the case. He wants Malfoy Enterprises to be presented as a forward-thinking company, an example of what other business should strive for in their hiring and human resources practices."

"I bet he does. And let me guess... you agreed, didn't you?"

"I didn't have much choice, Theo. So yes, I agreed."

"Does this mean you'll be working with him on a daily basis?"

"No, but I will be meeting with him and his human resources manager occasionally."

Theo watched her for a minute. "Well, he played that perfectly, didn't he?"

"Theo, what are you so angry about? You know that Draco and I are in love. In a little over four months he and are going to be free to date and explore our relationship. The only reason we aren't doing so now is because of you!"

"No, not because of me — because of my mother, Hermione. And because it won't work if you don't live under my damn roof and because I can't *stand* you seeing him while living here. I'm losing the person I love more than anything else in the world to a man I thought was my best friend. I'm only flesh and blood and bones and skin, Hermione. My heart breaks every day, a thousand times over because I've lost you. And now... now you're going to be working with him. You say it will only be occasionally, but he will worm his way into your office on a daily basis, you wait and see and if he hasn't already, he'll worm his way into your bed as well. He's a Slytherin, Hermione! It's how he works."

"He says the same about you all the time. I shouldn't trust you, that *you* are lying... you're a *Slytherin*! Honestly! You both make me crazy. I just want to be able to trust both of you!"

"Yes, well I feel the same way."

"Look, Theo. It's late and I'm exhausted. I have another long day tomorrow and I need to get some sleep. You need your sleep as well — you know how cranky you get."

"Why was your dress less wrinkled and your hair less messy when you left?"

"Because I cast a charm as I left, Theo! I had been sitting for hours and my dress was very wrinkled. I used his loo and looked at my reflection in the mirror. I looked terrible. In my anger I had run my hands through my hair and made a mess of it, so I redid it. I de-wrinkled my dress and we kissed goodbye. Yes, a nice *but brief* kiss, Theo. Get over it!"

Hermione stood up. "Are you coming to bed or not?"

He let out a heavy breath as he stood. "This whole situation sucks."

"Yes, well. We know whose fault that is, don't we?"

Theo grunted in frustration as he followed her. If she had gotten home even an hour earlier, she would have found him in a much worse mood. Ever since the second owl he had fluctuated between fury and despair. One minute he was going to throw her out and she could just deal with photos being released. The next he wasn't going to say anything. A small part of him wanted to simply take her. Force her to sleep with him. He was her husband after all. He had rights! But he would never do that, and he knew it. He had ultimately decided to be honest and now he knew it had been the right decision. She was irritated with him, but she wasn't angry. He was irritated with her, but he still had his four months.

Chapter 31

AN: Hard to believe but this story is almost finished. A chapter or two left plus an epilogue. Thanks to my co-writer, LissaDream! She's *amazing*!

Please check out our latest story, **Runaway**. It's posted on our new joint account on this website under the name *SnowblindLissadream*. We have moved our joint stories **Master Mine — A Lesson in Submission** and **A World Not Fit to Live In** to that account as well. We are leaving this story on my page because it's so close to being completed. Our stories can also be found on Archive of Our Own, Adult-fanfiction and Wattpad.

Thanks for all reviews! Please forgive our lack of review responses. We read and relish every single one of them!

INTERACT WITH US: We both have Tumblr accounts and we have a joint Facebook Account. We post pictures of what we imagine our characters to look like along with photos that inspire descriptions on these sites. Along with those, we interact with friends and followers and post when we update. Find us:

Facebook: [www DOT facebook DOT com / snowand DOT lissa DOT 7](http://www.DOTfacebookDOTcom/snowandDOTlissaDOT7)

Tumblr: LissaDream AND SnowBlind12

Hermione sipped her coffee as she glanced over her notes. "Ugh, this is revolting," she muttered, setting the coffee down. "Did you buy a different brand?"

"No," Theo looked at her quizzically. 'Same old brand. Is it burnt?' He sniffed his own cup of coffee before taking a tentative sip. "Mine's fine."

"Huh," Hermione muttered dismissively. "I'll grab a latte from the coffee cart when I get to the Ministry."

"Thought you hated latte's?" Theo snorted.

"I know!" Hermione wrinkled her nose distractedly while crossing a few lines out on her notes. "I guess I changed my mind." It was silent a few moments before Theo spoke again.

"You really should eat something, you know," Theo admonished. "You've barely eaten anything all week."

Looking up at him, she shrugged and responded, "it's my nerves. I'll eat after I get through the case today."

Glancing back down at her notes, she willed herself to relax. Today was the day. All the preparation and work would come down to her presentation. She felt her arguments and facts were well thought out and proved the need for her proposed legislation but unfortunately it wasn't up to her. While the Wizengamot had a small infusion of new blood amongst its ranks over the past few years, for the most part it was comprised of the same members since before

Voldemort's return. The group was quite conservative and not as forward thinking as the people for which they governed. She appreciated the position they were in, however. They had the daunting task of allowing change without causing chaos. While they had been slow to succumb to much needed changes, they had not shunned them altogether. They were just very cautious and were not typically quick to approve changes.

The past few weeks Hermione and Draco had managed to work together without too much drama. It had been difficult at first as he seemed to want to hijack her case and take the lead. Both Hermione and Draco were used to being in charge in the work place. As their work together progressed and Draco saw her in action, he quickly backed down and conceded the witch had it all under control. If Hermione had been more susceptible to fun distractions while working, Draco would have been at her office daily. However, the witch was rather steadfast, and Draco knew a lost cause when he saw one. Their meetings became less frequent, and sometimes he sent his head of Human Resources, George Flinton, in his stead. Once Draco had given George the leave to be forthcoming, the man had provided a wealth of useful information. Hermione came to like him and regretted the confrontational start they had experienced those months back when she first went to ME on Moxie's behalf.

As her thoughts wandered back to the offensive coffee in front of her, she peeked up at Theo to find him watching her with undisguised concern. He had continued to be supportive of her, but she appreciated that he had been less hovering the past couple weeks. He had expressed his concern about her working with Draco, but ultimately had backed down and had not said anything while they had developed their case further. He knew it was a losing battle. It was largely because of Theo that Hermione had resisted Draco's advances. The blond had pushed the issue at first, alternating between attempted seduction and Dominance, but she had not given in. Except for an occasional passionate snog, they had kept their hands off each other.

Ultimately, Draco admitted he understood her need to respect her husband's wishes. She didn't want to have to lie to Theo and she didn't want to complicate things. As much as it bothered Draco, and as hard as it was, he respected her all that much more for her integrity. Even though he didn't trust Theo, he did trust Hermione, and in truth, as twisted as it was, he still cared about Theo. When it came down to it, he would walk through fire for the man who had been his best friend since they learned the word Quidditch. Of course, he was no fool. He knew that Theo did not feel the same way. Theo would likely light the match to destroy Draco if he had it in his power, but Draco could afford to be the bigger man. After all, he had gotten the girl.

"What time is your presentation?"

"Ten." She looked up from her cup where she was fingering the rim, lost in her thoughts. "You don't need to come, Theo."

"No, this is important to you, and I will absolutely be there. I'm your friend, if nothing more, and friends support each other."

Hermione smiled at him and didn't pull away when he reached across the table and took her hand in his. Draco would call her a fool, but Hermione believed Theo when he said such words. She needed all the support she could get right now and was grateful for her soon-to-be ex-husband's friendship.

“Hermione, you really look pale. Please eat.”

“I can’t. I feel nauseated from nerves and my head is hurting again.” She shook her head dismissively. “It’s this case. I haven’t worked on a case that meant this much to me since...” She looked up at him. No more words needed to be said. They both knew what case she was referring to. The case which had been the catalyst for his affair with Daphne over five years ago.

“You’ll be great, kitten. You are worrying for nothing.”

Hermione and Draco met at the Ministry at just before nine o’clock. Hermione couldn’t help but smile. He was dressed in exquisite, traditional wizarding robes in a gorgeous shade of deep purple. “Well, don’t you look handsome. I’m not used to seeing you in such... traditional attire.” When she stepped closer, she noticed what she had thought was simply black and silver intricate stitching over his shoulders was actually an embroidered design of a dragon on each shoulder. It was quite impressive and looked like something Draco’s father would wear. “You look quite formidable actually,” she added, just stopping herself from running her hands over the fabric.

“Yeah, well I wasn’t about to wear a muggle Armani suit. It would be wasted on the Wizengamot.” His hair was a little longer and his steely gaze brought back flashes from Diagon Alley before her second year.

“Gah, you remind me of your father right now. It’s freaking me out a little bit.”

“Hmmm, you have a thing for my father, Granger?” He teased, cocking a brow.

“Ha! Uhh, no. But he is quite handsome and strikes quite a presence when he wants to.”

Their attention was pulled to the lift as Lizzy and Nelba arrived followed by George Flinton close behind. Hermione would be the one presenting but having the backing of Draco Malfoy would give her more credibility. Hermione hated to admit it, but just having Draco supporting the case could be enough to push it through. While outright bribery was a practice of the past thanks to Minister Shacklebolt, it was simple logic that the Malfoy’s deep and vast coffers still held tremendous influence. Supporting legislation in which Draco felt strongly about could only lead to more generosity from the billionaire. She had come to be grateful he was standing beside her and not opposing her from the other side of the room.

It wasn’t long before Rita Skeeter showed up. Draco and Hermione had given her an exclusive interview discussing the case that had been published in that morning’s edition of the paper. They would continue to give her exclusives as long as the case continued. Of course, Rita had been quick to remind Hermione she still owed her a juicy exclusive unrelated to the case. Hermione assured her she had not forgotten. What Hermione didn’t know was whether that exclusive would be the public announcement of her divorce or an interview in response to certain photos that would likely be released. Either way, Hermione was dreading it. A deal was a deal, however, and Hermione would not go back on her word.

It was twenty minutes before ten when Theo arrived. Hermione could feel Draco tense next to her when Theo approached, but her husband remained calm and friendly. He addressed everyone and was particularly warm towards Lizzy, whom he had always liked.

While Theo and Draco were cool towards each other, they did offer proper salutations and avoided saying anything incendiary to each other. As the group stood together and watched the clock, Hermione suddenly began to feel sick.

“Oh my goodness,” she gagged and her fingers moved down to clutch her belly. “Please excuse me!” She gagged a second time and, ignoring the startled and concerned looks from the group surrounding her, made a mad dash for the nearest loo.

There was no way she was going to make it to a toilet and, knowing there was nothing in her stomach but latte, she instead headed for the nearest receptacle — which happened to be a sink.

She gagged horrifically a few more times before the contents of her stomach made a forceful reappearance. Fumbling with one hand while she retched, she turned the spigots of the sink to wash the sick down even as it spewed from her lips. When it stopped the first time she gasped deeply, her abdomen convexing with the force of the breath. Unfortunately, the fluctuation of fresh air caused her to gag again and she was retching a second time before she knew it. It felt like it was coming from her toes and her stomach cramped so forcefully that she had to combat the pain by gripping the edges of the porcelain sink so hard her knuckles turned white.

When it was over, Hermione felt completely wrung out and had to lean onto the counter while she carefully filled her lungs with fresh air. After a moment she rinsed her mouth and spat a few times before looking up to meet her reflection’s gaze. She was dismayed to find herself looking sweaty and pale. Was it a million degrees in here, or was it just her?

Quickly she pulled her wand out of her robe pockets and shot a cooling spell at her clothing. She used a piece of paper towel to dab her face before reapplying a few subtle makeup charms to give herself some color. All the while, she was berating herself, *What is wrong with you? Get it together!* and then something sprung to the forefront of her mind. A new panic, completely unrelated to her case overcame her.

Grabbing her planner out of her briefcase, she counted back the weeks. “Oh, Merlin.” *Has it really been that long?*

“Hermione? Are you alright? They’ve opened the door for us to enter.”

Hermione looked at Nelba and nodded. “I’m fine. Nerves are just wreaking havoc on me.” She tossed the paper towel into the bin and ran her hands over her blouse and skirt as she walked towards the exit of the loo. There was nothing she could do now except proceed with the case. She would worry about everything else later. Sounding more confident than she truly felt, she smiled. “Let’s do this.”

Two hours later, Hermione had presented her case. Each member of the large panel had received an outline and attached had been case studies of the individuals whom had been discriminated against. She had presented each case thoroughly and spoke with confidence. She pointed out the vast differences in the cultures of various magical beings. She discussed the many ways those differences could lead to misunderstandings. She discussed the opportunities to learn from each other’s strengths and how working together would lead to more comfort and comradery outside of the work place. Goblins, house elves, humans, Veela, and werewolves were all intelligent beings that had much to offer to society, to the work place

and to each other. She touched lightly on the fact that discrimination was more blatant towards females than males.

For the most part the members of the Wizengamot were silent and read through the material as Hermione spoke. She tried to inject some humor and presented a few anecdotes of harmless and funny misunderstandings that she had learned of in her research. Interspersed were more serious examples of cruelty that might have been avoidable if there was simply more knowledge and understanding.

When she had finished talking and the floor was opened for questions, Hermione tried not to become resentful when many of the questions were directed toward Draco. How much was the culture sensitivity training costing the company? Had he seen a change in working relationships? How long ago did Draco implement changes? Draco answered each question calmly and made it clear he was in full support of Hermione's legislation. He embellished and implied he had been concerned about this issue for quite a while. Hermione could only shake her head at the cunning way the man twisted the facts to his advantage, Malfoy Enterprises smelling like a freshly bloomed rose in spring.

There had been some dissension and a few business owners from the community had come out opposed. They claimed it was unfair to dictate their hiring practices. They had the right to hire whomever they wished for whatever reason they wished. They felt they shouldn't have to pay for sensitivity training. The community should offer the classes instead. It pleased Hermione that the brunt of the discourse was over who would provide the training, not that it wasn't necessary. It seemed everyone agreed there was a need for education.

When all the questions had been asked and answered, the secretary of the council, Elspeth Irmadine, called for an adjournment after thanking Hermione for her well thought out and presented case. Hermione assembled her notes and documents and placed them in her folio feeling she had done the best she could. It was now out of her hands and they would just have to wait for a verdict. It was likely the Wizengamot would want to question some of the individuals from her case studies and Hermione had arranged for them each to be available that afternoon. It would not be necessary for her to be present. This was not a civil or criminal court case and she was not their lawyer. It was merely information gathering. Hermione would make herself available for further questioning should they need her, however.

Theo had been sitting in an observation booth and was quick to rush down and congratulate his wife on a job well done. Draco tried not to react to the way Theo placed his hand on her back as she stepped towards the exit; he tried not to become angered when she didn't seem to mind.

After they exited the hall, Nelba excused herself to return to her office and George dashed off to Malfoy Enterprises for a one o'clock meeting. Lizzy had errands to run on her lunch break and therefore Hermione, Draco and Theo found themselves in an awkward grouping. Theo looked at Draco and then at Hermione and shrugged. "How about lunch? My treat."

"Actually, I'm starved," Hermione interjected as she looked at Draco for his response.

Draco was silent for a pause; not sure he was understanding. In a dismayed voice he asked, "The three of us... lunch... together?"

Theo smiled without humor. “Well, I for one am hungry and Hermione has barely consumed anything in a week. I know you don’t want her to have lunch with me and I don’t particularly relish the idea of her having lunch with just you, so I suggest we dine together.” He looked at Hermione and smiled. “I think for her sake and in celebration of her presentation being behind her, we should put our differences aside for one meal.” He looked at Draco, who gave a sharp nod of reluctant agreement.

A few minutes later the trio arrived at bustling French bistro around the corner from the Ministry. They were seated promptly at a small round table near the window and an awkward silence descended.

After a beat Draco quipped with a roll of his eyes, “I can’t believe the three of us are having lunch.”

“It’s just lunch, Draco. We can go back to hating each other in an hour.” There was a mix of bitterness and sadness in Theo’s subtle taunt.

Draco smirked. “I don’t hate you, Theo. I just know you and I don’t trust you. This act you are putting on is so obvious.”

Theo shook his head in dismay, his face collapsing into a mask of controlled anger. “Oh, that’s rich! You don’t trust *me*? Who stole whose wife, Drake?!”

Draco leaned closer to Theo, his posture threatening but his words quiet. “I didn’t steal her, Theo. I *rescued* her. You abandoned her, in more ways than one, *long* before I came along.”

“No! Every marriage has problems, Draco! Friends help their friends work through them. You were my best friend for over twenty years and the minute the opportunity came you chose her over me. You knew what...”

“Guys,” Hermione whispered, looking around the room cautiously. She could see they were drawing attention.

“You are so delusional, Theo! The minute? The minute?! *Are you kidding me?! You cheated on her for five years!*”

Hermione closed her eyes in mortification. There most likely wasn’t a soul in the entire restaurant who hadn’t heard Draco’s declaration that she had been duped by her own husband for five years. She felt a flush of heat overcome her and her heart started racing. Picking up her water, she held the cool glass against her forehead for a moment. “Please, guys. I don’t feel so good. Let’s just be...” she started in a quiet, but firm voice.

Neither of them were listening or paying her any mind as they continued to voice pent up frustration with each other. “I was miserable, Draco! I was with a completely unstable woman who I only wanted to get away from, but I was trapped. C’mon, you were married to a Greengrass! You know how bat shit crazy they all are. Astoria was...”

Draco stood and grabbed the front of Theo’s robes, lifting and pushing him against the window. His voice was low and menacing, “Don’t you talk about my wife like that! Don’t you fucking dare!”

“Oh! So now she’s your wife again?” Theo looked smugly over Draco’s shoulder at Hermione. ‘You hear that, kitten? Still calls her his wife! Are you sure about this g...?’ Theo

didn't finish his sentence however, his jaw fell, and he struggled to get out of Draco's grasp. "Let me go, Draco!" He yelled out, "Hermione!"

"What? You need a little witch to fight your battles?" Draco jeered.

"No, you *asshole*! Hermione! Look at her!"

Draco glanced back over his shoulder to see Hermione pale as a sheet and looking like she was about to pass out, her eyes were closed as she held her water glass to her forehead with a trembling hand. Draco released Theo and was upon her instantly with Theo right behind him. He crouched down next to her chair. "Hermione! What is it?" Draco's voice was panicked.

Her voice was shaky and she spoke softly. "I'm fine. I'm just hungry and tired and would appreciate if you would both stop acting like cavemen." Theo and Draco cut looks at each other as they slid back into their seats.

A gentleman approached their table. "Is there a problem? We have a strict no fighting rule and should it be necessary we will call the Aurors."

"Apologies, you won't hear another peep out of us." Theo was looking at the man apologetically. Draco only had eyes on Hermione.

"You're sure you are ok?" Draco asked as the gentleman walked away from their table.

She wanted to reply in the affirmative, but in reality, Hermione felt anything but ok. Her head was screaming, her stomach was roiling, and her mind was panicked with worry over her symptoms — not to mention the anxiety over her case. She felt relief yet a sense of dread as well. If her suspicions were correct, her condition would either trap her or free her. Relief came from the potential freeing, dread came that she would be trapped. There was no way to know which sentence she would have pronounced on her until she had herself checked out.

She looked from the concerned face of Draco to the matching one of Theo and felt her eyes begin to well, her emotions getting the better of her.

Both men froze, neither understanding what was going on.

"Well now look what you've done," Theo spat at Draco. "Why couldn't you just be civil for one meal?"

"Me? You're the one who..."

"Stop it, please!" Hermione begged softly as tears slipped free from the confines of her lower lashes. Draco stopped speaking and looked at her with obvious concern. She shook her head. "I need to get away — from both of you. I can't think straight." The minute she pushed herself up to stand, she swayed.

"Whoa, whoa, kitten. Sit back down," Theo commanded gently.

She shook her head as more tears slid down her cheeks. "No." She looked around the room. "I need to go." She whispered to herself. She turned away from them and took a step. She wasn't able to take another before she felt herself slipping to the floor.

While Hermione didn't fully lose consciousness, she was so dizzy that she did lose motor control. She never hit the floor, however, Theo scooped her into his arms as Draco dashed in

front of them, making a path through the tables and patrons, neither of them noticing the continued clicks of the camera that had been shuddering since the start of their fight.

The minute they were at the Apparition point, Theo spun and disappeared, Draco right behind them. Hermione felt the pull of the spell and the suffocation. The landing jarred her whole body, she couldn't open her eyes. That was disconcerting.

Theo's voice was panicked as he called out. "Help! My wife!"

Hermione eyelids were heavy. She felt a large, warm hand holding her own and could hear the sound of a frantically tapping foot. Smaller, cool hands were smoothing over her forehead. "Her initial diagnostics comes back that she's a little dehydrated and her iron levels are quite low. I'd like to run some more tests."

This unfamiliar female voice made Hermione realize that she must have passed out for a time. She was in a lumpy bed and the air was crisp and smelled of disinfectant. She willed her eyes to open as Theo's voice agreed. "Anything you think, Healer Jacobson."

Hermione's voice was raspy, and all three people in the room jumped when she spoke. "I think only one test is necessary, but if it comes back positive — a second will be needed."

"Thank the Gods." Draco's voice was rough with unshed tears as she made eye contact with him across the room. "You scared us, Hermione."

"I'm fine," she assured him quietly with a soft smile before turning her eyes to Theo. "Really," she continued firmly before removing her hand from his. Theo looked as though he wished to protest the loss of her fingers in his, but he didn't.

"Can I please sit up?" she asked the Healer. The witch gave Hermione a small nod and flicked her wand at the bed to raise it into a seated position.

"What test is it that you think you need, Mrs. Nott?" Healer Jacobson asked curiously.

"A pregnancy test." She looked the doctor straight in the eyes as she said it, forcing herself not to watch either wizard's reactions.

"Ah, that could definitely explain things, yes?" Healer Johnson's smile was kind. "You wish me to perform it now? Would you like your husband and Mr. Malfoy to step out?"

"Now is fine," Hermione answered, her voice shaking a bit. "Neither man needs to leave."

The witch twirled her wand, muttering the simple charm to detect pregnancy. The white light that glowed caused both Theo and Draco to let out surprised exclamations as Hermione's shoulders tensed.

It was welcomed news to her either way, she had always wanted children someday, and now was as good a time as any. The only thing that really mattered to her was... "Paternity can be determined with a charm as well?"

The Healer looked startled for a minute, but as she glanced between the wizards in the room their concern for the witch and animosity for each other finally made perfect sense. "Of course, all potential father's must be present, however."

“They’re both here,” Hermione said, lifting her chin as if daring the Healer to comment. Healer Jacobson was a professional, however. Who was she to judge?

“Lay back, raise your gown to reveal your abdomen, please. Gentlemen, you will need to cup your hands in front of you. The spell will settle in the hands of whoever is the father.” Another twist and twirl of the healer’s wand and Hermione’s low stomach brightened to a pretty amber color before dancing away from her body. Both men raised their hands, cupping them as instructed. The light spun around all three other people in the room before marking the baby’s father by resting gently into the palms of his hands before sinking in to make his skin glow.

Healer Johnson left the room discreetly as Hermione’s eyes filled with tears and a gasped sob left her body. Her eyes locked with Draco’s stunned ones as relief filled her entire being. They shared a sweet moment before a soft curse caused them both to look at Theo.

If Hermione ever felt she had seen true despair and disappointment on her husband’s face before, it was nothing compared to what she was witnessing in this moment. He looked as though the breath had left him. He was pale and looked lost. The fight had left him. It was the defeat in his eyes that proved how much hope he had obviously been harboring. His words were whispered and raw with his own choked emotion. A tear escaped, and he quietly wiped it away as he looked in his wife’s eyes. “I’ll just... leave you two alone.” He turned and as he walked out of the room Hermione was desperate to somehow comfort him. But she knew there were no words. Nothing she could say would make it all better. He needed to lick his wounds. The door closed with a quiet click.

Feeling the bed dip beside her and a warm palm rest over her lower abdomen, Hermione’s attention was pulled back to the moist, steel-grey eyes of her lover. Draco crawled into the bed and pulled her close as she rolled onto her side, spooning back into him. Neither said anything as the gravity of the situation settled over them.

Her words were almost monotone. There were no histrionics or sobs of panic. She merely laid out the truth as it was. “There will be no stopping those photographs now. I’m not only an adulteress, I’m pregnant with another man’s child. Ezmirelda will do her best to destroy me.”

Chapter 32

Thanks to my brilliant co-writer, LissaDream and our wonderful BETA, Rayne Phoenix2!

Thanks also to all who review! We truly appreciate you taking the time to leave a thought or two. We read every one of them and I apologize for not responding to them for the last couple chapters. We just haven't had time.

We are in the process of cleaning up this story and are actually re-writing some of the chapters. We aren't changing plot or anything, just re-wording and improving the descriptions and what not. We've only gotten through the first six chapters so far, but will slowly work our way through the other chapters that need sprucing. It's amazing how much my/our writing has changed over the past year and a half!

Anyhoo, thanks again for reading and reviewing! :)

Chapter Thirty-Two

BETA — Rayne Phoenix2

As soon as Theo left the room, Draco climbed into the hospital bed to pull Hermione close and spoon her into the cocoon of his arms.

Her words were almost monotone and there were no histrionics or sobs of panic; she merely laid out the truth as it was. "There will be no stopping those photographs now. I'm not only an adulteress — I'm pregnant with another man's child. Ezmirelda will do her best to destroy me."

His soft breath brushed against her cheek as he whispered, "Shh, pet. It's going to be okay. The important thing is we take care of you and our baby. I'm sure we have a little time before Ezmirelda does anything rash." The consoling edge of his voice left completely when he added definitively, "But regardless, you are out of Theo's flat now. You will come live with me. We'll get married as soon as your divorce is final."

Hermione let out a mirthless laugh. "Draco, I'm *not* moving in with you and I'm certainly not getting married right away! I'm not even divorced yet."

"Yes, but you are carrying a Malfoy in that delicious belly of yours, love. He'll be legitimate, and he'll bear the Malfoy name and reap the benefits that come with it. We owe him that, don't you think? For him to be born to married parents who love him and provide everything he will need for a happy and prosperous life?" He laughed lightly. "Besides, Janky will be beside himself with excitement over this turn of events. He already idolizes you — to have you be his Mistress and be bearing the newest Malfoy heir? Merlin help us all."

Hermione couldn't argue that logic, but she wasn't convinced a marriage certificate would make them better parents. Deciding to let it go she peeked back over her shoulder and asked, "Do you think I can get out of here? I want to get my cat and go home."

Thirty minutes later, Hermione and Draco entered Theo's flat. The air was still and quiet and Hermione breathed out a sigh, believing them to be alone. A flick of her wand and her many scattered belongings gathered onto the coffee table. She watched as books, CD's, unopened mail, photographs, and clothes from the hallway closet made their way to the crowded surface.

Heading to the bedroom with Draco on her heels, she immediately froze upon the site of Theo laying on their bed. He was on his side, facing away from the door. He didn't stir upon their arrival. No one spoke for a moment and Hermione realized she and Theo still had words to say to each other. Peeking back over her shoulder, she found steel grey eyes which glanced concernedly from the still figure on the bed back to her. They moved to her lips when she softly said, "Draco, go. I'll owl you when I get to my place. I need to speak with him."

Not wanting to leave, but respecting the circumstances, Draco kissed her forehead lightly and paused only a second before leaving.

Theo had not said anything and was still on his side, facing away from her. Hermione walked around to what had been her side of the bed and sat on the edge, turning back to face him.

He was staring straight ahead, his face was void of expression, empty...

Lost.

"Theo," she whispered. 'I'm sorry. I'm sorry things are so... gah. I just don't even know what to say.' She watched him for a moment. "I guess I'm just sad it's over between us and I hate that you're hurting. Despite everything, I want you to be happy, Theo. I love you, you know that, right?" Now that they were here — at *the* moment; at the very end of everything they had shared — Hermione felt sick with heartache.

In a different world, she and Theo would have stood the test of time. They would have filled a home with children, watched them grow and marry, and been excited when those children had babies of their own. They should have been married a hundred years — even longer. They could have held their small, personal world in their hands and been happy and content until the day they crossed the veil and beyond...

If only she hadn't gotten so involved in that case all those years ago. If only Theo had told her that he missed her and that they needed to carve out more time. If only she had realized what the removal of his dominance had meant. If only he had told her the truth about Daphne. If only she had told him about Draco's proposition.

If only...

If only...

If only...

The world of "shoulda", 'woulda', "coulda", and "if only" was a terrible game to play with oneself. It tore the soul apart. It was as they say — hindsight is always twenty-twenty.

All those weeks ago, when she realized she had fallen in love with Draco Malfoy, Hermione had come to terms with the fact that she and Theo were only supposed to last a season of time. They had needed each other, and, for their time, they had been happy. The last few years, however, they had just been existing.

Then Draco blew in on the winds of change and now her and Theo's season was over. Hermione knew her forever lay with Draco. It was hard not to be sad about leaving Theo behind, though, he had meant so much to her for so long. It was doubly hard leaving him when she knew that he still held love for her that she could no longer return.

His eyes suddenly moved to hers, his expression still far away. "The first time I ever saw you, I mean *really* saw you, you were in the library."

Hermione couldn't help but chuckle, even if it was a bit of an unhappy sound. "Hmm... what a surprise."

He smiled softly as he continued, "It was fifth year and things in the castle were... awful. That dreadful woman, Umbridge, was running the school and everyone — except maybe *Draco* — was miserable."

Hermione let out a real snicker this time when Theo rolled his eyes as he said Draco's name. "There was a second year Slytherin crying because she had just come from a detention with the hateful bitch. Despite her being a little pureblood dressed in green, you — the beacon-of-light Golden-girl — comforted her. You led her to a corner where she wouldn't have to be seen crying, much less be seen being comforted by a Gryffindor of all people."

Theo shifted and moved his right hand under the side of his face as he continued. "I knew you were smart and I knew you were Harry's best friend. Of course, I also knew that you were Muggle-born, but that was all I really knew about you. That day in the library I learned you were kind and had a generous nature. At first, my Slytherin brain thought you must have been putting on a show for a teacher. You know, playing the perfect prefect in the hopes of landing the Head Girl badge down the line," he gave her a teasing smile, which she returned softly, "but it wasn't false — *nothing* about you ever is. You genuinely cared that she was upset and wanted to help her. You were even late to Potions because of it. It made Snape's day when he had a legitimate reason to castigate you in front of the class."

Hermione's lip quirked into a fond smile of remembrance. "You realize that every time you tell this story, you make me seem more and more angelic and selfless."

His blue eyes met her chocolate ones when he spoke softly with obvious sincerity, "I guess that's because you become more and more angelic and selfless to me with each passing day."

Hermione climbed further onto the bed so that she was leaning against the headboard, sitting up as he continued to lay facing her. "Theo, I think we both know that I'm neither of those things. You've always put me on a pedestal — no one can ever live up to those kinds of expectations all the time."

It was quiet for a moment as they continued gazing at each other with sad eyes. After a moment, Theo tentatively reached for Hermione's hand and held it gently as he let out a shaky breath. "I'm going to do everything I can to protect you from my mother, Hermione."

Hermione stared at her hand in his and then responded in a resigned whisper. “I’m pregnant with Draco’s baby, Theo. Your mother is going to *crucify* me.”

Theo’s look become lost again. It seemed that the mention of the child that should have been his caused him to wish for the good-old-days all over again. His tone was completely forlorn when he spoke next. “For a minute there — when I thought the baby might be *mine*? — I felt the greatest happiness I have ever felt in my life.”

Hermione felt a stab of pain for Theo and fought the rising despair in her chest as she struggled for something to say. Before she could open her mouth to respond, however, he whispered with heartfelt sincerity, “You’ll make a wonderful mother, kitten.”

Hermione wiped the tears that escaped her lashes. “Oh, Theo,” she said shakily as she pulled her hand away from his and grabbed a tissue from the box on the nightstand. She wiped her eyes and cheeks and after a second glanced down at him. “You realize you’ll need a beater bat to keep the witches off you when it gets out you’re single again.”

His lip quirked into a playful smile at her attempts to lighten the mood, but it didn’t quite reach his eyes. Hermione felt the urge to sob at how desolate he seemed. “Well, I’m sure in some misguided attempt to ail my broken heart, I’ll bask in those attentions far more than I should.”

Hermione laughed lightly as she slid off the bed and began gathering her things. Theo rolled to his other side and pushed himself to sit on the edge of his side of the bed. He watched her as she moved about the room. “If you leave anything I’ll set it aside for you,” he whispered.

Hermione nodded and answered softly. “Okay. Thanks, Theo.”

She glanced about the room to be sure she had everything before looking back at him. She watched him as he stood and approached her until he was close and towering over her. She didn’t step away from him when his hand gently cupped her cheek while his eyes searched her face as though he was trying to memorize every angle and freckle. He closed his eyes and pulled her to him, enveloping her in his arms as he buried his nose in her curls. After a moment, he let out a shaky breath before he kissed the top of her head and whispered, “You take care of yourself, love.”

Hermione swallowed the lump in her throat as she pulled away and looked up into his blue eyes. Pressing up on her toes, she kissed him very gently and very chastely on his lips. She was unable to stop the tears when she pulled back and found his eyes were closed with a mixture of pained bliss. A tear escaped one of his own eyes to trail down his cheek.

“You too, Theo,” she whispered brokenly, gently wiping the tear with the tips of her fingers.

With one more glance about the room, she waved her wand to levitate the bag with her belongings to follow her as she walked out of the bedroom — leaving Theo behind. The gentle click of their bedroom door gave finality to the moment.

Forcing down the emotions of the day, Hermione peered around the flat and spotted Cassiopeia sitting in the kitchen window sill. She dashed to her cat and swept her up, “Come along, Beauty. We are going home.”

A short walk and Apparition later and Hermione was in her beloved flat. A simple cleansing spell left the surfaces clean and sparkling, all traces of dust and disuse vanished.

“Are you sure you won’t come stay with me?”

Hermione smiled, not surprised by Draco’s sudden arrival. “No, I want to live on my own for a bit.” She set the box with all her shrunken belongings down on the kitchen counter and turned back to face him. “Stay the night with me?”

“Oh, of that you can be certain, witch. I’m not sleeping away from you again. You are mine, no matter what roof you shut your eyes under.”

She smirked up at him as he crossed the small space and she reached to slide her hands around his middle. A little sigh escaped her lips as his palms cupped her jaw and tilted her head up. Then he was kissing her, and it felt as if it were the first time. The electric current of the moment zapped between them, causing her to hum in her throat and draw a deep breath in through her nose.

She wasn’t even sure exactly how it happened, but the next time she took in her surroundings, Draco had her sitting on the kitchen counter while he stood between her knees. His shirt was unbuttoned, and her blouse had been thrown into the sink. Her bra had been pulled under her breasts which forced her nipples up high and they were already tight with need. She moved back in to kiss him, but his look stopped her.

His grey eyes were dark and covetous with desire and his voice was raspy as he demanded, “On the floor, hands and knees. Crawl and follow me,” in his Dominant tone. Hermione whimpered in the back of her throat when he didn’t even wait to make sure she would follow his command; he just turned and walked towards her bedroom.

She slid off the counter and crouched onto all fours, arching her back like a cat and slinking after him in what she hoped was a graceful manner. Her heartrate was accelerating at an alarming rate and her breathing was ragged with anticipation. They hadn’t participated much in their D/s relationship for too long. They hadn’t been free to. Now — now they were truly free. There was nothing to hide, no one to hold them back from being together. All the inhibitions could melt away.

When Draco turned his eyes back to her, it was to watch her move through the doorway of her room. He had wondered if she would obey and he felt no small amount of relief when she not only obeyed him but did it without hesitation. The arch in her back drew his eyes to the round globes of her bum. Fuck, he couldn’t wait to spank her. He snapped his fingers, his eyes glittering with humor as she turned slightly narrowed eyes up at him. For a brief moment he thought that maybe she forgot — or that she was going to pretend she had forgotten — but then she gave what was an obvious sigh of resignation and moved into the first kneeling position he had taught her.

“Good girl,” he whispered, walking around her appraisingly. “Remove your bra.” She complied and then returned her hands to her lap with her palms up, awaiting his next instructions.

Draco stopped behind her and gently finger combed her hair into a pony tail before securing it with a whispered sticking charm. With no warning he grasped it violently and pulled. "Stand!" he commanded as a gasp of surprised pain left her. Hermione quickly rose to her feet, slightly desperate to take the sting out of him pulling her hair even as she felt the deluge of arousal flood her knickers.

Brusquely, he marched her to her bed before bending her over it forcefully. "Your safeword is red, pet," he instructed as he tucked the hem of her skirt into her waist band before brutally tearing her underwear out of the way. "Count." He took both her slender wrists in one on his hands and held them roughly to the small of her back.

There was no warning as the sound of his hand to her backside made them both jump with how loud it reverberated around the room. Then Hermione gave a low moan in the back of her throat which caused Draco's already hard cock to fill to capacity, straining against his trousers painfully.

"One!" she gasped.

Smack!

"Two!"

Smack! Fuck, he had missed this. So fucking much.

"Three!"

Smack!

"Four!" Draco had increased the firmness of each blow to her backside slightly. The fifth landed hard, causing her to grunt, "Ow! Five!"

Smack! He backed off a little, wanting her a writhing mess of need with these spankings, not miserable. True pain was for punishments, this pain was for arousal. He landed the seventh blow. Smack!

"Seven!"

A villainous grin crept across his face as he watched her rub her thighs together, striving for the friction she so desperately needed. "Ah, ah, ah. None of that," he scolded, teasingly. "Spread your legs a foot apart."

Hermione complied somewhat unwillingly and then she was crooning as his hits became a regular rhythm of sting and heat, building her arousal with each strike. "Fifteen!" she growled, rolling her hips with her desire.

"Pet, I want you too much," he confessed after the twentieth hit, releasing her wrists. "We'll do this all properly soon, right now I just need to be buried inside you," he added urgently as she heard the unbuckling of his belt followed by his zipper. Instantly, he was thrusting into her from behind. Stretching her, filling her, they both exclaimed incoherently as they were overcome with the thrill of a savage pounding. Draco reached around to find her slick slit, furiously torturing the little nub of nerves as she pushed back to meet him stroke for stroke.

“Fuck!” she shouted as he wound her womb tighter and tighter before she exploded. “Draco!”

“Yes!” he hissed, grasping both her hips with his hands as her arousal juices flowed hotly over his dick and he pounded himself through her contracting muscles. ‘Merlin, witch!’ he groaned when his bollocks tightened, and his climax shot out of him while tingles of the sweetest pleasure reverberated up his spine. A moment later, he lay his weight across her back, pressing his forehead into the juncture where her neck met her shoulder and dropping kisses above her shoulder blade. “I love you, Hermione,” he told her hoarsely. “I’ve missed you, very much.”

Hermione turned her head to the side, so she could catch his eye and smiled lazily, feeling very relaxed after their passionate romp. “I love you, too,” she promised breathlessly, tilting her chin so she could kiss him on the lips. ‘We’re on the right track now,’ she continued. “I know it won’t be easy, we just have to take it one step at a time.”

He nodded, his eyes serious. “Everything will be okay in the end,” they both gave a small noise of protest when his softened cock slipped out of her, “we’ll get through all this together.”

Draco stood and watched appreciatively as Hermione rolled to her back, before his eyes settled on her lower abdomen. Without conscious thought, he tenderly stroked the skin beneath her navel. When he glanced up at her, she was watching him with knowing eyes. “Doesn’t seem real yet, does it?”

“It doesn’t.” He reached with both hands and helped her into a sitting position while moving to stand between her legs. Settling his mouth over hers, he kissed her long and deep, tangling and untangling his tongue with her own. He loved it when she dug her fingers into his locks and held on tightly while he continued to devour her, knowing that her arousal was growing all over again. Well... they had all night... and the next... and the next. And all the nights — for the rest of their lives.

“We’ll go to St. Mungo’s tomorrow to see my GYN,” she promised him when the kiss broke some minutes later. “It’ll be more real, then.”

He nodded in agreement before pulling her gently to her feet. “Right now, the only place we’re going is your shower... and then maybe the kitchen counter... or the wall... but we’ll end up in bed eventually. Your thoughts?”

Hermione’s amber eyes had darkened with need and he chuckled ominously. “I believe that sounds like a wonderful plan,” she answered, her lips twitching into a seductive smirk.

“Hermione?”

Draco and Hermione both looked to the Mediwitch calling her name as they rose to their feet. A few minutes later, Hermione was in an itchy hospital gown while sitting on the edge of an examination table between the stirrups meant to hold her legs in place. Draco, for some reason seemingly anxious, was pacing the small room as she tracked him with her eyes.

“What’s the matter, Draco?” she asked when his nervousness started affecting her.

“What is wrong?” He dragged a hand through his hair and fixed almost wild eyes on her. “Shit, Hermione! We’re pregnant!”

Hermione stared at him for the briefest slice of time before she burst into uncontrollable giggles. “You just worked that out, did you?” she gasped between galls of laughter. “I take it that it just sank in? Here in the GYN office with the stirrups staring you in the face?”

He sank to one of the hard, plastic chairs meant for family and buried his face in his hands. “Something like that,” he muttered in a muffled voice. He looked up and their gazes caught. “Aren’t you scared?”

“Bloody terrified,” she admitted before she began chewing on her bottom lip, ‘but I think everything will be okay in the end. It’ll get worse before it gets better, but Draco?’ She paused for a moment and searched his eyes with her own. “I’m excited, too. Before all this craziness went down, I was thinking it might be time to start a family. This wasn’t quite how I planned it to go, but now? Now I’m relieved Theo and I haven’t had any children. You’re my future. You and this child.” Hermione looked down to where her hand was settled over her abdomen and smiled contentedly.

Draco’s worried expression melted away and was replaced with a soft look of complete understanding. He was about to speak when the door burst open.

“Mrs. Nott,” Healer Anderson said scoldingly as she pushed through the door. “I see you didn’t take our letters to heart.”

When she looked up from her clipboard she met Hermione’s confused expression and was startled to see Draco Malfoy sitting where she had expected Theo Nott to be. Her steps faltered. “Oh, my.

“What letters?” Hermione asked, prompting the witch to turn her attention back to her.

The plump, sweet-faced woman back tracked a moment before squaring her shoulders and moving to sit in her chair. “The letters that informed you that your birth control potion had come from a bad batch and to make an appointment to be seen and receive supplemental protection.”

Hermione’s eyes widened comically, and Draco couldn’t help the snort of laughter that escaped his nose. “Oh,” she whispered as Draco shook his head with mock-sternness.

Hermione covered her mouth with one hand and shook her head in dismay. “I thought, I thought the notices were to remind me of my annual. I didn’t read them,” she gave her Healer a contrite look as her hand fell back to her stomach, “but now that you mention it, there *were* rather a *lot* of notices.”

“Well, it is what it is,” the healer continued. “Are you keeping the child?”

“What?” Draco asked incredulously.

At the same time Hermione snapped, “Of course I am!”

Healer Anderson held up her hands in defense. “It’s a reasonable question in this situation,” she said kindly, looking pointedly at Hermione. “How far along do you think you are?”

“Twelve weeks, maybe?” Hermione answered, her voice just a bit cool at her GYN’s less than subtle rebuke.

“Excellent.” The witch went on to ask Hermione about her symptoms, answering questions and concerns along the way. She prescribed some potions for morning sickness and fatigue before standing. “Shall we take a looksee at the baby’s vitals?”

“Yes,” Hermione answered, and for the first time all visit her voice was laced with a tinge of excitement. Draco stood and moved next to Hermione as Healer Anderson gestured for her to lay back on the examination table. A couple swishes of her wand and a series of lights and runes started to glow, causing the healer to smile gently.

“Growing well, healthy. You are fairly correct in your assumption, I have eleven weeks and five days gestation as the reading.” Another swish and more runes glowed before a gentle *whoosh-whoosh, whoosh-whoosh, whoosh-whoosh* sound filled the room. “That would be the heartrate... at...” there was a pause as the witch counted “...168-beats-per-minute. Perfect, perfect.”

A few more flicks and swishes occurred as Draco took Hermione’s hand and laced his fingers through hers, his eyes suspiciously sparkly and a smile pulling on the corners of his lips. She wouldn’t tease him, though, she had tears running down her own temples while she grinned stupidly at him as little giggle escaped her throat. What an extraordinary sound!

“Would you like to know the sex of the child?”

“I would,” Hermione answered. “Draco?”

“It’s a boy, Hermione. I’ve already told you,” he teased, referring to a brief chat they had in the middle of the night. “Malfoys have only birthed boys for the last three centuries.”

She grinned at him wickedly. “I’m not a Malfoy, Draco,” she reminded him snarkily. “I think it’s a girl. Care to place a bet?”

“Hmm... okay,” he said. “If it’s a boy, I get to name him. If it’s a girl, you choose.”

“Deal!” Hermione’s eyes glowed as she looked to the healer. “Yes, we’d like to know the sex.”

“Alright then.” Her wand danced intricately through the air before she smiled wickedly, and her gaze moved back to the couple. “It’s a —”

Monday morning, Hermione smiled as she came to consciousness wrapped in Draco’s strong arms. Her joy was compounded when she found herself *not* nauseated for the third morning in a row. The potions seemed to be working. Nestling deeply into her pillow, she pressed herself into the warm body behind her and poised for another hour of sleep. A soft groan and a hardness pressing into her back told her Draco was awake and that her hour of sleep was likely only a thing of dreams.

Her complaint was short lived however, when his left hand stroked her hair and gave it a slight tug before snaking its way down her cheek to her neck where it took a possessive hold.

His show of Dominance elicited a soft, grunty mewl from her throat and she immediately complied when he whispered, "I want you on your back."

Her heart began fluttering with anticipation as he adjusted himself on top of her. His eyes were a lusty dark as the one hand maintained its grasp around her neck and the other began to explore her body under the silky fabric of her nightgown. It paused its travels and tenderly caressed the soft skin over her lower abdomen as his lips moved to her own with the lightest, feathery touch. Craving more contact, she attempted to push her lips more firmly up onto his, only to have her forward motion halted by the spreading of his fingers from around her throat to incorporate her jaw. He chuckled darkly, "No moving, pet. I'm still not used to waking up with you in my arms and I intend to work you into a frenzy."

As he lightly peppered her mouth with barely-there touches from his lips, the hand on her belly continued its venture to the apex of her thighs. Just as his fingers began to explore her neatly trimmed curls, an incessant tapping on the window interrupted them.

"Ignore it," Draco's husky voice whispered as he moved his lip's attentions from her mouth to her breasts.

Unable to resist, Hermione glanced towards the tapping only to spot an owl flapping its wings and watching them. "It could be important. I should grab it."

"This is more important," he responded in a muffled voice, his mouth still feasting on her breasts as his fingers dipped into the dewy moisture coating her nether lips.

"It could be from the Ministry... or from the Medi-witch," she gasped while arching her back as the tug of her nipples pulled the invisible string in her womb.

Draco let out a puff of impatience as he pulled his mouth back from the particularly tasty spot he had just discovered next to her left nipple. "Fine," he begrudgingly pushed himself off her, "don't move. I'll get it."

Hermione watched with no small amount of ogling as her very naked wizard climbed out of the bed and stalked towards the window. He opened it easily and took the envelope from the owl's leg before spitting out, "Scram!" to the highly offended bird.

He closed the window to find Hermione giving him a reproachful glare.

"What?"

"What do you mean... 'what'? That was very rude! The poor creature was merely doing its job."

Draco shrugged as he looked at the envelope. "It's from your office."

Sitting up, Hermione snatched it from him and ripped it open urgently. Her eyes quickly glanced over the words before she looked up nervously. "The Wizengamot is voting this morning on my proposal." Hermione jumped out of bed and dashed into the bathroom before Draco could even respond.

An hour later, Hermione, Draco, and Nelba waited anxiously outside the Wizengamot chambers. Technically, they didn't need to be there, but Hermione made it known to the governing body that she was right outside the doors should they have any last-minute questions for her. She knew they had researched her facts and had likely called other

witnesses as well as business owners before them to testify. If they had done their jobs, there was no way they wouldn't see the bias and prejudice towards non-human magical beings that was still very abundant in the work place. Particularly, towards females.

It wasn't until lunchtime that the doors swung open and the members made quick strides past them for the lifts. Hermione looked at their expressions for answers but all most of them did was offer a friendly nod as they walked by. No one stopped to talk to them until the secretary of the council, Elspeth Irmadine made her way over with a small smile on her face. "They passed your proposed legislation — with only a couple modifications — by a wide margin, Mrs. Nott." Hermione could feel Draco tense beside her when her name was spoken. She couldn't change her name to Malfoy fast enough in his eyes. She, on the other hand, was leaning towards retaking her maiden name, Granger. She was not looking forward to *that* discussion.

"What modifications?" Hermione asked.

"Mainly the time frames for each phase of requirements. The board felt businesses will need a little more time to adapt and make the changes. The Wizengamot also approved another position in Ms. Bittington's department to help oversee compliance of the adaptations."

Hermione and Nelba looked at each other with stunned faces. While they had both determined the Department of Magical Being Protection and Oversight needed more hands to help handle compliance if the legislation were passed, they had both agreed to hold off on such a request until after it had happened. The fact the Wizengamot saw this need without prompting and had acted on it proved that they truly believed in this legislation and clearly wanted it to succeed. Hermione thanked the elderly witch profusely for the good news.

"I think this calls for a celebration!" Draco whispered after Ms. Irmadine walked away with Nelba.

Before Hermione could respond, however, Rita Skeeter approached the couple. "I heard the news. I'd like an interview with the two of you to accompany the article I have planned."

For a second Hermione wondered which news the gossip queen was referring to. "Of course, Rita. I can't speak for Mr. Malfoy here, but I would welcome the chance to go on record about this legislation." When Rita shot Hermione a knowing look, Hermione acted quickly. "By the way, that exclusive I promised you? It will be soon."

"How soon?" the garish witch asked with a touch of warning. Hermione couldn't help but wonder if Rita either already had the truth about her marriage or something else up her sleeve. The way she was looking at Hermione was with a rather smug expression. "Within the week, I'm sure," Hermione responded a bit cautiously.

"A week is an awfully long time. Someone else could break the story before then," Rita replied in a sing-song-y voice.

"Just what are we talking about?" Draco asked with no small amount of confused irritation as he looked from Hermione to Rita and back again.

Hermione cut him a glance. "Just an exclusive I promised Ms. Skeeter."

Hermione looked back at Rita. "Give me five days. No longer. Even if it gets out, no one will hear a peep from me before you. You will be the only reporter I talk to."

Rita huffed with irritation. "Fine, fine. I'll expect an owl." Looking from Hermione to Draco she turned to walk away. "Toodles."

As Hermione watched the older witch walk away, she felt herself wondering if Rita *really* already knew something, or if she had just played Hermione brilliantly.

"Are you sure they're not going to freak out, Draco?" Hermione questioned nervously as she watched her reflection twist and turn in the mirror, checking every angle of her elegant dress robes.

Draco chuckled at her apprehension. Sure, his parents were going to be surprised to see him bring Hermione Nott née Granger for dinner, but the second they found out she was carrying his child, it would be nothing but gushing excitement from his mother. His father would maintain an outward sense of cool politeness, but Draco knew he was itching for a grandchild as badly as his mother was.

Once upon a time, Lucius would be horrified that Hermione was a Muggle-born. While he would still be very reserved with his affections (and would sometimes have to watch his ingrained derogatory remarks), he was much more open in his mindset these days. The war had changed all the Malfoys drastically, but his father most of all. Draco knew the only thing that would concern his father greatly was how quickly he could get his son and future daughter-in-law down the aisle, so the child was born legitimate.

"It will be fine, pet," he assured her gently as he moved up behind her and smoothed his hands down her arms in a gesture of protectiveness and comfort. He watched the lazy smile cross her face as his palms detoured to encircle her waist before rest gently on her still flat abdomen. "I love you," he murmured in her ear before pressing a kiss to the erogenous spot just behind it.

"I love you, too," she murmured as she turned in his arms, and raised to her toes to press a chaste kiss to his lips. 'I'm still worried,' she admitted when she pulled away. "The scandal surrounding me is going to be a very good reason for them to not accept this."

"We're going to figure it out, Hermione," he promised.

An hour later, Draco ushered Hermione through the doors to an elaborately decorated parlor in Malfoy Manor. Both Lucius and Narcissa Malfoy rose upon their entry before freezing at the sight of her. The Lord and Lady of the house recovered admirably quickly after exchanging a startled glance. Draco had told them he was bringing a woman with him tonight and had warned them that he had every intention on marrying the witch in question. When pressed for details by Narcissa, their son had remained elusive, asking them only to keep an open mind.

"Mrs. Nott," Lucius greeted with a stiff nod of his head. "What... a pleasure to see you again. It's been a few years, no?"

Hermione felt her cheeks grow hot at the subtle spurn. The last time she had seen the Malfoy patriarch had been at her and Theo's wedding. "Yes, sir," she answered, forcing herself to remain polite. Draco had stiffened at his father's words and shot the older man a glare while Narcissa busied herself by crossing to the drink cart.

"Something to drink, Mrs. Nott, Draco?"

"Please call me Hermione, Mrs. Malfoy, and just some water," Hermione answered, grateful for the quick topic change. "Thank you for having me for dinner, Mrs. Malfoy."

"Narcissa, Hermione. It's our pleasure," Narcissa smiled kindly while she handed Hermione a champagne flute of sparkling water. "Here you are Draco," she continued, raising her eyebrows at her son while giving him his usual glass of fire whisky.

"Let's sit, love." Draco ignored his mother's questioning glance and took Hermione's elbow before steering her to the settee across from where Lucius had retaken his seat. He almost laughed aloud when Lucius' face noticeably paled at his son's term of endearment for the married Muggle-born witch.

Narcissa watched the couple covertly as she fixed herself and Lucius their typical before dinner drinks. Her son was overly protective of the witch, hovering and touching her every chance he could. It may have only been minutes since they had walked through the door, but it was obvious to Narcissa that Draco was deeply in love with the witch.

With his best friend's wife.

She touched her head lightly, feeling a headache of confusion coming on. What in the world were they thinking?

"I can see the way your mind is going, mother, please have a seat and we'll explain," Draco chuckled as he watched his mother out of the corner of his eye.

A few minutes and typical pleasantries later, Draco launched right into their story.

"Theo Nott has been having an affair on Hermione for the last five years," he told the now astonished couple. "About two and a half months ago, Hermione and I began seeing each other quietly while she started the proceedings to divorce him." He purposely left out the part about him approaching her for a D/s contract before Hermione had discovered Theo was cheating.

And on the tale went. He explained that Hermione had left Theo and was on her own when Ezmirelda proposed her blackmail. Wrapping a protective arm around his embarrassed witch, Draco explained that the photographs the Nott matriarch had were of Hermione and Theo and only of Hermione and Theo. He briefly told them how she moved back in with Theo and that the couple were going through the motions to hold Ezmirelda off. How Draco had realized he was in love with Hermione and asked her to leave Theo, scandal be damned.

As Draco spoke, he watched his father carefully. Lucius maintained an expressionless face, although Draco could tell by the shadows in the elder Malfoy's eyes that he was not liking where this story was leading. Not one bit. Draco knew his father very well, however, and knew better than to have any doubt in his own conviction towards Hermione. The minute Lucius smelled weakness, he would pounce. Besides, his father would feel differently once he had all the information. Draco was sure of it.

Draco told them everything. Right up to, “Hermione’s pregnant, mother — father. A paternity test was done; I’m the child’s father.”

Hermione, face permanently pink at this point, wasn’t looking at either Malfoy. She had hardly been able to look at them during the entire explanation. She felt like a bloody teenager going to mummy and daddy with her unexpected pregnancy. She kept her eyes focused solely on Draco and his excitement of the last bombshell he dropped. He was truly thrilled to be a father and her heart swelled as she realized that — no matter what happened with the coming gossip — they would survive it and come out stronger on the other side.

“A... baby?” The tone of Narcissa’s voice made Hermione look up. The woman sounded positively delighted. She looked from Narcissa’s surprised, but eager expression to Lucius Malfoy. The man had terrified her in her youth and was still intimidating to say the least. The expression on his face, however, when Draco confirmed his mother’s question that he was going to be a grandfather made Hermione’s chest heat with warmth.

Apparently, Draco hadn’t been lying to ease her mind. His parents had changed and were obviously excited to hear of the upcoming birth of their first grandchild. Lucius caught her watching him and schooled his features, a slight scowl slipping onto his face. Hermione was no longer fooled, however. Not now that she knew what to look for; she could see the sparkle of excitement in his eyes.

Lucius sat back on the couch and propped one ankle on the opposite knee. He found his wife’s hand and slid his fingers over the top of hers and squeezed gently. He contemplated the curly-haired, Muggle-born witch that obviously had his son wrapped around her still-married-finger over the rim of his wine glass. He could see her nervousness, which thrilled him. It was nice to know she was still intimidated by him and that she was being cautious. The way Narcissa was gushing and exclaiming over the upcoming bundle led him to believe his wife had already accepted that she would marry Draco.

He wasn’t so sure about that. She and Draco could have the child and his son could acknowledge it as a bastard and set up a trust fund. The child would never want for anything. While that wouldn’t paint them in a very nice light, the higher societal circles wouldn’t frown at it. Tainting the Malfoy line with Mudblood was hardly palatable.

However... this was Hermione Granger. *The* Hermione Granger. She could put them back on top by marrying Draco. They could come full circle and return to their rightful place as Kings and Queens of the wizarding world. They would be seen as having changed completely and many of the Sacred Twenty-Eight would even turn a blind eye to their offspring only being Half-blood with how powerful and influential Granger was. They would deem it an infusion of “fresh-blood”. Within a century, no one would remember that the Malfoy line had been tainted by a Mudblood.

Lucius’ lips quirked into a small smile and he eyed the young witch again as she conversed with Draco and Narcissa, discussing the unborn child. A grandchild. It had been a long time coming. He and Narcissa had expected Draco and Astoria to have children immediately. Narcissa had been ever-so-disappointed when they hadn’t. Draco had confided in Lucius that Astoria was just too frail — he didn’t want her to bear his sons. Thus, Lucius had allowed the divorce. Granger was a strong witch with a fiery personality. She was overtly powerful and unquestionably brilliant. She had been touted as downright cunning in the courtroom...

leading Lucius to wonder if she had a rather less unfortunate bloodline, would she have been a candidate for Slytherin?

Then something was said that made Lucius' eyes grow wide. He straightened his body slowly to sit up properly and looked Granger in the eye. "Tell me again," he demanded, his stomach clenching with eager pleasure.

Hermione smiled softly at him before she repeated herself. "The child is a girl."

Absolute silence followed her statement as Lucius' brain worked fast, all the needed pieces falling into place. "You will wed the moment you divorce to make sure the child is claimed legitimately. We will lie and say she was early while praying you deliver past your due date. That is my only demand."

"Like I was saying, Mr. Malfoy, it might be best to wait for the scandal of the photos being released to calm down. We don't want too much atten —"

Lucius waved his hand at the girl, feeling his heart constrict. A *granddaughter*. There hadn't been a female Malfoy in over three centuries. All Malfoy women since had married into the family. "Do not concern yourself with the scandal. It will be taken care of. My granddaughter will be *legitimate*. End of discussion."

He didn't miss the way both Draco and Narcissa were grinning at him smugly. The wretches knew exactly how he was feeling. Even Granger's wide, doe-like eyes were knowing. He ended the conversation with finality when he stood and announced, "It's time to eat, let's move to the dining room."

The next day, Hermione and Draco arrived back at the Manor via floo promptly at noon as requested by Narcissa. Hermione felt certain that this was going to be a very awkward and uncomfortable visit. Now that Draco's parents had had the chance to truly absorb everything, they were likely distressed by their son's association with a woman who was about to be tainted with a scandal of such epic proportions.

Hermione had warned Draco what would likely happen today, but he had insisted it was not the case. If it was, he promised he would marry her anyway. Hermione wasn't so sure he would be so noble if his inheritance was on the line. It was with heavy dread that she followed the house elf, Tinny, into Lucius's study.

"Mistress says the young Master and Miss is to wait." With a pop, Tinny was gone. Hermione and Draco looked at each other with curious expressions. Even Hermione knew it was odd to be led into a room without a host or hostess there to greet them and felt sure that her fears were about to be realized.

It was of no matter that the night before had gone well — any minute now, Lucius would storm in and pronounce her a harlot who had bewitched his son most egregiously and demand she cease all contact with him. He would insist she had become impregnated on purpose in the hopes of securing some of the Malfoy fortune for herself. Because of the pregnancy, there would probably be some sort of pay off offered as well. Giving herself an internal pep talk that she would refuse any such offering and would take the insults thrown at her with as much

dignity and grace as she could muster, she watched with resignation as Draco walked over to the refreshment table where he prepared them each a cup of tea.

Placing their cups with saucers on the coffee table in front of them, Draco sat next to her and smiled softly, "It's going to be fine, pet. I know what you are thinking, and I promise that you are wrong. They will be here any minute with words of ap..."

He was interrupted when suddenly there was movement in the large, life size gilded mirror to their right. A mirror neither one of them had noticed until that very moment, it had certainly never graced the study before.

Rather than their own reflections, the mirror revealed the Lady's Parlor. Narcissa was positioned on a beautiful chaise lounge and dressed as immaculately as always in finely-spun spider silk robes. The shimmering fabric was done in shades of gold and deep red draped her perfect figure magnificently. When she stood, she looked every bit like a woman of royalty. Hermione felt Draco stiffen beside her when Tinny escorted Ezmirelda Nott into the Parlor where Narcissa greeted her with not-quite touching kisses to each cheek.

"What the hell?" Hermione whispered.

"Shhh. Something's afoot love," Draco reassured. Although Hermione didn't think he sounded as confident as he had only moments earlier.

Hermione could not disagree — this could be bad — really bad. Was Narcissa in cahoots with Ezmirelda? Would Rita Skeeter walk in next to be handed a folder full of photographs and a sordid tale to accompany them? Hermione began to feel sick.

In the Lady's Parlour, Narcissa coolly contemplated her old "friend" while spewing the standard greeting. "Ezmirelda, my dear, it's such a pleasure to see you. You look lovely! Thank you for coming on such short notice," Narcissa purred as she gestured for Ezmirelda to have a seat.

"How could I not rush right over, Cissy! Your message left me quite perplexed and concerned. What is this injustice and tragic situation with which you require my assistance? You know I am always available to you and the others."

Hermione didn't miss the way her mother-in-law had said "available to you and the others". Ezmirelda was truly a snooty piece of work. She could never resist the opportunity to rub it in Narcissa's face that she was now the social queen bee of the pureblood circles. Narcissa had been tainted by her association with Voldemort, but Ezmirelda had been able to avoid tarnishing her own name.

While her husband had been a Death Eater, Ezmirelda had evaded any association with Voldemort. Her son marrying Hermione after the war, as well as her own development of the muggle born outreach program, had secured her status as the usurper to Narcissa's previously held rank amongst the pureblood witches. The Nott's were also the second wealthiest to the Malfoys, and her riches furthered her ascent and her favor.

Narcissa sat on the opposite end of the tufted crème colored chesterfield sofa from Ezmirelda, the witch's bodies slightly facing each other like bookends. Tinny served them each a cup of tea and then popped out of the room.

Narcissa took a sip and then put her cup with saucer on the coffee table. She smiled softly at Ezmirelda and then spoke. “Ezmirelda. We’ve been friends many years and it is for that reason that I am coming to you so that you can refute the terrible tale that was brought to my attention recently.”

Ezmirelda straightened her back slightly and, with a look of surprise, replied, “Well, I’m intrigued. What is it that you wish me to refute? Tell me right away so that I can reassure you, my dear friend.”

“Well, it’s a rather delicate situation. One that involves your son, or more pointedly, your daughter-in-law.”

Ezmirelda sat stunned for a shimmer of a second and then oozed into the concerned persona of a woman under much duress. “Oh dear. You’ve heard? I was told of some... disturbing photographs and some behavior...” She sighed heavily. “However, I was not aware the information had been made public.”

Narcissa was dismissive of Ezmirelda’s façade as she asked with distaste, “Is it true, Ez? You have photographs to be released to the public eye? Photographs of your own daughter-in-law?”

Ezmirelda seemed to consider her options before answering. She smelled a rat. “Tell me Cissy — if I did, why would you care?”

“She cares because Hermione grows the next Malfoy heir in her womb. She cares because you are blackmailing the girl in a most despicable way.”

Both women turned towards the booming voice of an irate Lucius Malfoy who stormed into the room, tossing a folder onto the table before his wife. He smirked at her attire, noting how the garments subtly showed support of their soon-to-be daughter-in-law. Narcissa’s appraisal of her husband was glittered with affection, while Ezmirelda stared at the wizard completely stunned.

“What?” Ezmirelda choked. She tried to look innocent as her mind spun.

Narcissa sighed dramatically. “Oh, Ezmirelda. How could you? Such photographs will not only ruin Hermione, they will ruin Theo. It will be argued he is the blurry male figure. Why would you subject them to that?”

“You know nothing of what you speak, Narcissa. It is not Theo, but *multiple* partners with which that tramp of a witch took to her bed. She is an adulteress and a harlot. She is...”

“Desist your blathering, woman,” Lucius interrupted. “You are speaking of my son’s future wife and the mother of *my* grandchild.”

Ezmirelda shook her head in disgust and then let out a huff of indignation. “So, this is how she is trying to worm her way out of my clutches. By worming her way into your son’s bed!” She rolled her eyes. “Don’t you see what she’s doing? Are you even certain it *is* your grandchild she is carrying, if she’s *really* even pregnant? Last I spoke to Theo, Hermione was still sleeping in his bed!”

“Only because your blackmail forced her to lead a double life, Ezmirelda!” Narcissa proclaimed. “Hermione was faithful to Theo for five years while he cheated on her with

Daphne Greengrass. She found happiness with Draco and they have fallen in love.’ Her tone turned softer. “Ez, I understand. You want your son to be happy and you don’t want the scandal of a divorce in the Nott family history. But don’t you think that you serving a stint in Azkaban for blackmail and slander is far worse than allowing your son a simple divorce?”

Ezmirelda cut Narcissa an evil glare and a tone of warning. “Are you *threatening* me, Narcissa?”

“Well, no. Not really threatening... merely pointing out the obvious. Hermione is best friends with Harry Potter, Ez. She is close to the Minister himself. Do you, for one second, believe that once those photos are released and Hermione tells her side of the story that you won’t be accused of blackmail? Of sexual extortion? For the benefit of your son?”

Lucius spoke quietly but with no small hint of dismissiveness. “You were sloppy, Ezmirelda. You left a written trail. Notes and threats via owl. You have no way of denying what you have done.”

“Ah, Lucius. You have a talent for avoiding persecution for your crimes, what makes you think I can’t do the same?” She huffed. “I have deep pockets as well, you know.”

Narcissa scooted towards the exasperated witch and took her hand. “Ez, please. Please destroy those photos and stop the blackmail. Let Hermione live her life and let Theo move on. He is a handsome wizard who is intelligent and charming. Despite everything, Hermione still cares for him. Let them part amicably so he can find his happiness. He will never be happy with a witch who loves another.”

Lucius rolled his eyes and demanded impatiently. “Enough! Show her, Cissa. Show her.”

“Show me what?” Ezmirelda pulled her hand from Narcissa’s as she looked at the platinum blond wizard who was now sitting in a Queen Anne chair across from them.

Narcissa gracefully leaned forward and lifted the folder off the table. She spoke softly and wistfully. “The years before the madness set into my sister’s mind, she had a brief time in her life when she was truly happy. Before that first stint in Azkaban, she was beautiful and radiated grace and strength. Her marriage was not a happy one, yet she positively *glowed*. She smiled and laughed easily. We always assumed it was The Dark Lord — we were sure she was having an affair with him. Then we found these,” Narcissa opened the folder and stared at its contents, ‘letters and photographs.’ She lifted a photo out and looked at it, smiling warmly. “Ahh, so beautiful. The sheer bliss on Bella’s face in this one — it’s lovely. Of course, your face is buried between her thighs... but it’s so obviously you.”

She batted her lashes lightly as she looked up at the frozen face of Ezmirelda Nott. Glancing back at the folder as though she were looking through a photo album of someone’s grandchildren, she lifted out another. “And then there is this one. I confess, I’ve never been one to share, but it’s lovely that Rudolphus allowed your affair and this picture of you and Bella tending to him so thoroughly... well, it’s no wonder he approved. It was as if he had the joy of two wives... is it not?”

“Tell, me Ezmirelda. Are you certain Theo isn’t a Lestranger?” Lucius teased with a smirk.

Narcissa looked aghast as she pulled out another photo. “Now this one... this one *did* surprise me. To think none of us believed you had anything to do with the Dark Lord. Yet

here you are,” she passed the photo to the ashen and stunned speechless witch and continued in the same sweet voice, ‘with him buried in your... well. You can see for yourself.’ Narcissa’s eyes moved back and forth with the motion of the wizarding photograph. “That had to have hurt, Ez. Tell me... do you build up to something like that? I mean, you appear to be enjoying it.”

“Where did you get these?” Ezmirelda snapped in an icy voice. She reached forward as though to snag the folder out of Narcissa’s hands.

Narcissa shifted it out of Ezmirelda’s reach as she put the photo delicately back in the folder and pulled out a stack of letters. “But it’s the letters... the letters are what *truly* moved me the most. Did you know she kept them?” She looked up questioningly at the shocked witch.

Ezmirelda seemed to have completely deflated before them. Narcissa continued, “I haven’t read them all, but the ones I did were very touching. It’s plain you loved my sister very much.”

“I’ll ask you again. Where did you get these?” Ezmirelda’s voice was no longer cold but strained with obvious emotion.

Narcissa shrugged. “They were amongst her things in her bedroom suite. After she died, we found them.” She put the folder back on the table. “It was many years ago.”

“You had no right, Cissy. That’s personal. You should have... you should have...”

“What, Ezmirelda? We should have what? Given them to you?” Narcissa asked.

“They weren’t yours to...” Ezmirelda stopped speaking, her eyes were glistening.

“I do understand, Ez. I’m sure you feel quite violated right now.” She sighed. “In truth, we didn’t tell anyone about this folder. It’s been locked up in one of the Manor vaults all these years. We could have destroyed you with these, Ezmirelda. You cheated on your husband, had a lesbian affair with my sister, had threesomes with Bella and multiple wizards — including the Dark Lord. But out of love for my sister, and out of respect for you and your privacy, we said nothing.”

“Yet, you kept them!”

Lucius laughed. “Of course, we did! It would have been very un-Slytherin-like to have destroyed them or handed them over to you. There was always the possibility they would... be needed one day.”

“Yes, one day when you had a need to blackmail me! Or Theo!” She spat.

Lucius smiled maliciously. “Or others. There are many married wizards depicted in those photographs. Tell me... was that your end game? Is that why you and Bella took these photographs? For blackmail? Is this what gave you the idea to have Hermione photographed?” He leaned back and smirked. “I must say, I find it particularly fitting that you are actually guilty of what you accuse Hermione of being. A promiscuous and deviant tramp.”

Ezmirelda shook her head and looked up at the ceiling, as though praying for some kind of divine intervention. “Of course not! These were never taken with the intent of blackmail. It

was Trixie's idea. She enjoyed looking at them afterwards. She enjoyed watching our memories in a pensieve as well."

There was moment of silence. Just as a tear broke loose from Ezmirelda's glamour'd, luxurious lashes, Narcissa handed her a lady's handkerchief and spoke in a soothing and reassuring voice. "Ez. No one need see these. No one need know *anything* about this. All you have to do... is the right thing. Let Hermione go. Destroy everything you are holding over her. If you do that, this folder will never see the light of day again."

Narcissa smiled lightly. "I'll even give you copies of whatever you want. There are some lovely pictures of the two of you I'm sure you would like to have." She pulled out a picture of the two witches laughing as they sat together on a bench in the Nott Estate gardens.

Ezmirelda took the moving picture and let out a small sob. "I loved her, Cissy. With all my heart."

Lucius rolled his eyes and let out a sigh of disgust. "On that note, I'm going back to my study." He stood. "I'll bid you a good day, Ezmirelda." He exited the room in a billow of robes reminiscent of another dark wizard from the past.

In the other room, Hermione and Draco stared at each other in complete shock.

Chapter 33

Well, here it is! The final chapter! Thanks to all who reviewed and supported this story. LissaDream and I are thrilled to have this done and we hope you enjoy the ending.

Thanks to our amazing BETA, RaynePhoenix2!

Just an FYI, we are still in the process of re-working some of the old chapters. This is likely of little interest to most of you, but I'm letting you all know anyway ;)

Please leave a review if you are so inclined. It would mean a great deal to us!

Hermione couldn't believe what she had just witnessed. She sat in disbelief, not saying a word as the mirror showed a crying versus laughing Ezmirelda looking through the stack of photographs. Narcissa seemed to be consoling the evil witch, but even Hermione realized it was a game of social politics. Each witch now held something over the other. Ezmirelda held scandalous pictures of their grandchild's mother and the Malfoy's held scandalous pictures and letters of Ezmirelda herself.

Lucius entered the study and walked to the bar, pouring himself a glass of fire whisky as two house elves entered to remove the mirror.

"I don't... I don't know what to say," Hermione said in a soft, stunned voice. Draco seemed as much at a loss for words as she was. He simply squeezed her hand as he watched his father with a slightly slackened jaw.

Lucius turned back towards her and gave her an assessing look. "I hope you learned a couple things today, Hermione. One — we Malfoys will always protect our own; two — it never hurts to know another's secret... their weakness. That folder would have never seen the light of day if she hadn't threatened you; the future wife and mother of a Malfoy."

He sipped his drink and smirked as he settled into the mahogany leather wingback chair facing them. "I'm sure you have a typical Gryffindor rebuttal about how terrible blackmail is and how people are noble at heart and that having leverage over others is unnecessary." He tossed back the rest of his drink.

Hermione laughed without humor. "I think you have Gryffindor confused with Hufflepuff. I'm not so naïve as that, Mr. Malfoy. I'm thrilled you had that folder." Feeling confident, she called a spade a spade. "Of course, I'm also not naïve enough to think you aren't gathering leverage on me as well."

Lucius' head fell back as he laughed heartily. "We'll make a proper Slytherin of you yet, my dear."

Draco shook his head. "He's teasing, love. Malfoys don't threaten and hold leverage over each other." He looked at his father and added with a challenging tone, "Do we, Father?"

Lucius set the empty glass on the table next to him. "Of course not." He grinned somewhat devilishly at Hermione and she found herself squirming slightly under his gaze. 'The Malfoy marriage bonds are powerful. They are very old magic and prevent any type of treachery or betrayal on either side once you make them to each other.' He stood and approached the bar, pouring himself another drink. "As you'll see at the ceremony, Cissa and I will be making a vow as well; a vow to protect your union, as well as you and your happiness." He turned to face her. At her look of contemplation, he continued, "In other words, the bonds include more than simple vows of love, respect, and fidelity between the two of you. As his parents, we will be bound to protect you as if you were our very own daughter." He walked back to his chair and sighed, a look of disappointed resignation coming over his face. "It's one of the reasons we didn't fight Draco's divorce to Tory. Narcissa and I had to look out for her best interests as well as our son's. If it had not benefitted them both, there would never have been a divorce."

Hermione had never heard of such a thing. No wonder Malfoys were so incredibly protective of their own. Their vows required it.

Hermione turned to Draco and found his eyes were soft and on hers. She offered him a reassuring smile and looked back at her future father-in-law. Somehow, she knew Lucius would find a loophole if it were ever necessary. Not that he would find it so; Hermione intended to do her best to be a good wife to Draco and a wonderful mother to their children.

Draco stood and approached Lucius, offering his hand for his father to shake. "Thank you, Father."

Lucius looked from the hand to his son's face before standing and clasping it. He seemed to pause and then pulled Draco into a fierce hug. Hermione could see Draco tense at the contact, but after a second Draco relaxed and hugged his father just as fiercely in return. "You are welcome, my son. I will always protect you and those whom you love." Lucius pulled back from Draco and cleared his throat, as though shaking off the moment of intimacy. Hermione wondered how rare these types of embraces were between the Malfoy men.

"Well, I'm famished!" Narcissa announced as she entered the study with a flourish. Hermione watched as Lucius' expression softened as he looked at his beautiful wife.

"Yes, I imagine you are quite hungry, my flower. You were rather magnificent in there, you know," he crooned as he approached her and kissed her softly. There was great love between the two and Hermione felt like she was getting to know them... just a little bit.

"I can't thank you both enough," Hermione said softly. "This has been a very difficult and stressful time that has gone on for months. In less than sixteen hours of finding out, you took care of it. You... have saved me from such humiliation. I know you did it more for Draco and for your unborn granddaughter, but I am eternally grateful." She could feel her eyes watering as the relief started to really take hold.

Lucius didn't say anything, he simply looked at her as though at a loss for words.

Narcissa gracefully glided to Hermione's side and sat next to her. Taking Hermione's hand in her own, she smiled warmly. "Tish tosh. You're to be family. No thanks are necessary." A mischievous little smile crept over her mouth. "Besides, I thoroughly enjoyed myself in there. It was nice to see that vulture have her perfectly groomed feathers ruffled."

Hermione shook her head in dismay before smiling conspiratorially. “It was, wasn’t it? That must have felt fabulous.”

Hermione rubbed her eyes. The tension headache had only gotten worse when the owl post arrived. She looked down at Harry’s handwriting. “How could you not tell us? Are you ok? We’re bringing lunch. See you at noon.” Sighing heavily, her eyes drifted to the cause of the discord. The headline of the Daily Prophet was still yelling at her from the corner of her desk;

**HHERMIONE NOTT LEAVES HUSBAND OF SEVEN YEARS
FOR BILLIONAIRE, DRACO MALFOY**

By Rita Skeeter

This is big news my fellow witches and wizards!

Hermione Nott nee Granger, of the famous Golden Trio, has left behind a stunned and heart-broken husband of seven years for his best friend and best man, Draco Malfoy.

A picture of Hermione and Theo from Ezmirelda’s gala showed them looking at each other with what appeared to be adoration. Hermione remembered that moment. She and Theo had known the photographer was coming around and they were trying to put on a show of being a happy couple. Looking at the picture, it was obvious they succeeded.

The picture next to it showed Hermione standing with Draco at the same event. They were near each other at an appetizer table and she was seen leaning in front of him to pick up a carrot stick. Her lips are moving slightly making it appear she was speaking covertly. Draco was checking out her cleavage in the process, which the photo implied was her intention.

She was a doting wife in one picture and a scheming seductress in the next. Of course, in truth, that was when Hermione had reminded Draco that she loved him and asked him to trust her. She had no idea at the time she was offering Draco such a view... or that he was indulging.

Damn that Skeeter woman to hell! Hermione had trusted the witch to print a non-sensationalized article. Hermione had done as promised and granted the garish reporter an exclusive interview with first rights to a story that would be big news. She foolishly hadn’t anticipated Rita would revert to her old tricks. She thought they were past that. Obviously, this was just too juicy an angle not to pursue.

The news clipping had gone into detail about Theo’s work with the illiterate and his dedication to the wizarding library. He came across as a saint who practically worked for peanuts for a good cause, while she was off cheating on him with his best friend — who also happened to be the wealthiest Wizard in the UK. She looked like a scheming gold digger. Never mind that she had her own fortune or that Theo worked for next to nothing because he had a trust fund that guaranteed he never had to work a day in his life if he should choose.

She looked up as Lizzy entered with another owl post. The older witch’s gaze was full of caution as she handed it over. Hermione’s name was written in a very elegant script and with what must have been a calligraphy quill. The seal bore the Malfoy crest. She opened it with dread.

Another lesson, my Dear. Never trust Rita Skeeter with any news that is of a personal nature. As a future Malfoy, this is imperative. Negative publicity must be avoided. Please seek my council should such a Gryffindor impulse cross your mind again.

—Lucius

PS: The east wing has been prepared for you and Draco as promised. The nursery is the same that generations of Malfoys have been raised in, including myself and Draco. It would be a shame if Daffodil were to miss out on such a tradition.

Gahhhh! Hermione balled up the note and threw it in the trash. The pressure for Draco and Hermione to move into the Manor had begun the first evening Draco brought her there. Hermione could tell Draco was slowly being persuaded. She, on the other hand, had no desire to live in the mansion. And if Lucius *sodding* Malfoy thought for one *second* she was going to name her daughter *Daffodil*? She shuddered and visions of her being called Daffy was almost enough to negate the effect of the anti-nausea potion she was still imbibing. While Hermione had not determined a name yet, Daffodil was certainly not it! It wasn't even in the top hundred.

She spotted Harry's note and felt a flush of guilt. She had planned to tell Harry, Ginny, Ron, and Susan that evening about leaving Theo for good and being pregnant with Draco's baby. It was a conversation she had been putting off and she regretted that they found out from the morning edition and not from her own lips. Rita had published the inflammatory article two days earlier than agreed. Lucius was right. She would never utilize Rita for anything again, personal or not. At least the article made no mention of the pregnancy.

Two weeks later, Hermione's divorce was final, and they were celebrating at the Manor. The Malfoy men had manipulated some significant strings to pull off the fastest divorce in UK Wizarding history. Hermione suspected some palms had been greased in the process, but she preferred not to know and therefore didn't ask.

Lucius had been reading the Evening Prophet when they arrived via floo. Upon their entry to his study, he tossed the paper dismissively aside. Hermione couldn't miss the large headline and picked it up to read.

UNTAINTED SACRED TWENTY-EIGHT NO MORE

Theo Nott Divorce Leaves None of the Elite Untouched

Traditionalists and historians will remember today, as will anyone with a longing for the lost values and old ways of the wizarding world. For over a year, the Nott's were the last family standing without a divorce to mar its history. That all came to an end this morning when Hermione Nott, nee Granger, divorced Theo Nott, her husband of over seven years. The Malfoys and the Notts held that proud standing together over the last ten years until just over a year ago when Draco Malfoy divorced Astoria Malfoy, nee Greengrass.

"It's really very sad," commented Florina Pexley of Plymouth. "I grew up idolizing the sacred twenty-eight as representatives of all that was good and decent in this world. They were the beacons of propriety. It was very disappointing when so many of them aligned

themselves with the bigotry and hate of You-Know-Who. But this divorce just closes the lid on that last glimmer of what I revered as a child.”

However, not all agree. “That’s hogwash,” replied Fortescue Barnicle of Devon. “It was all so false. That whole Sacred Twenty-Eight nonsense. Bunch of hoity-toitys who thought they were above everyone else if you ask me. My cousin Willoughby’s neighbor had a friend who spent time with those elite poufs. He said they used to screw around on each other because they couldn’t divorce. Better to divorce than to live a lie, I say. That Hermione Granger has the right of it in my book. She’s a Muggle-born and clearly has a touch of sense between her ears. Good for her to move on and try to be happy.”

Hermione couldn’t read anymore. She wondered what Fortescue would have to say if he knew she had screwed around on her husband with his best friend and became impregnated by him. *Bet he wouldn’t think I have so much sense between my ears after all.*

Her gaze was drawn to the photos underneath the article. The first showed Hermione with Draco’s arm protectively around her as they left the Ministry just after signing the parchments. The picture next to it was of Theo, walking alone with a forlorn expression. The caption under the photos read, *Hermione Nott on Draco Malfoy’s arm before the ink dries on her divorce documents. Theo Nott pictured alone less than ten minutes after his divorce was finalized.* It seemed the paper was still bent on portraying Theo as a victim.

Hermione tossed the paper aside, completely exhausted from the whole thing. She wished she could bury herself under her pillow and sleep for about three weeks. She had never realized how tiring pregnancy could be. Of course, it wasn’t just that. The stress and depression of her divorce coupled with the excitement of marrying Draco and the constant pestering of Lucius-headache— Malfoy had just about done her in.

Ever since the Ezmirelda show down, Hermione and Draco had dined at the Manor no less than six times. It seemed Narcissa was determined to get to know her future daughter-in-law, and Hermione had to concede she enjoyed the witch’s company very much. Hermione had always assumed Narcissa to be a typical trophy wife; beautiful and skilled in social settings, but not an intellectual or someone whom Hermione could hold a real conversation with. The Malfoy matriarch had proven Hermione quite wrong and she was thrilled to find they held the same passion for ancient runes and charms as well as history. Narcissa was even fluent in Muggle history and Hermione was shocked to learn there was a time the Malfoys and the Blacks were part of Queen Elizabeth’s court in the fifteen-hundreds. This was before wizarding society began isolating itself from the Muggle one. The magic was always kept a secret, but everyone, magical or not, jostled for favor or perhaps a marriage to the Queen.

Hermione had just finished the last of her Beef Wellington when Draco started on her about taking the Malfoy surname after their wedding, which would be in two-week’s time. She cut him a look with narrowed eyes, realizing he was calling in back-ups by broaching the topic in front of his parents.

“Draco, I don’t see why it’s such a big deal if I go back to my maiden name. It won’t make me any less your wife or any less devoted to you.” She was so very tired of this argument.

“Hermione, please. I want us to have the same name — your daughter will have a different name then you!” Draco argued.

“Who said I’m not going to insist she be a Granger, too?” Hermione snapped waspishly.

The sound of a fist on the table made Hermione jump. “Like bloody hell! My granddaughter will be a MALFOY, plain and simple!”

No one spoke for a solid two minutes before a soft voice of reason permeated the room. “I propose a compromise,” Narcissa suggested calmly, shooting her husband a look of warning. “Hermione could hyphenate — but all children will be Malfoys.”

Everyone was silent for a minute, mulling over the idea while eyeing each other suspiciously.

“I’ll concede to that on one condition,” Hermione mustered petulantly after a moment.

“What’s that, Miss Granger?” Lucius asked with raised eyebrows.

“I get to keep my cat when I move in here.”

“Well, that’s hardly a significant thing,” Lucius said. He completely ignored the fact that Draco shaking his head violently while miming someone slitting his throat.

“Dad, you really don’t —” he began.

“It’s a deal then?” Hermione interjected quickly. “Give me your word, Lucius.”

“I swear you can keep your familiar,” Lucius nodded firmly. “You must hyphenate your name and all children will be Malfoys.”

“Agreed.”

Draco dropped his head into his hands.

Two Weeks Later

“Mm,” Hermione sighed happily as she sank into a chair before a beautifully set breakfast table. ‘This looks wonderful! You should come join me — *husband*.’ She looked over appreciatively at the sleeping form of her brand-new husband, their vows only being hours old. “I’m sure we have a wonderful article to peruse in the Society Section this morning,” she teased as he let out a little groan while rolling to sit at the edge of the bed.

He stretched and yawned, grinning when he caught his wife ogling him with raised eyebrows and a smirk over the rim of her coffee cup. “That little ‘insider information’ envelope we sent her last night probably made her whole year. I am curious to see if she blew it out of proportion, though.”

He pulled on his boxers, which were discarded half-hazardly off one side of the bed in their eagerness to consummate their union the night before, over his hips and trudged over to her. Running his hand through his sex-and-sleep-tousled hair, he dropped into the seat next to hers after pressing a kiss to the top of her head.

Hermione shook out the paper and grinned at him when — as expected — the photo they had sent in was blazoned across the front of the Society pages. In it, Draco was being told he

could kiss the bride which then led to him giving Hermione a dazzling smile and dipping her with a heady kiss. The headline read:

MALFOY HEIR WEDS WAR HEROINE IN SECRET

Exclusive Insider Leak by Rita Skeeter

My Dearest Readers,

I write to tell those witches who were hoping to snag one of the Magical World's Most Eligible Bachelors that they will be disappointed with today's news! At sunset yesterday in a very quiet ceremony, Draco Malfoy was bound to recently divorced Hermione (Granger) Nott. They were attended by Lucius and Narcissa Malfoy for the groom along with Harry and Ginny Potter and Ron and Susan Weasley for the bride.

An unnamed source tells us "The couple is so excited to start the next step in their lives together. Both divorcee's feel they've got it right this time!" Well, doesn't that just make the Cauldron melt? Seriously, gag me with a wand. This reporter is of the mind that Mrs. Granger-Malfoy is most likely expecting a little bundle. It would explain what appears to be a rushed matrimony. We'll have to see as time progresses. Anything earlier than a December birthday would mean the child was conceived before the proverbial knot was tied.

The scandal surrounding the old Mrs. Nott becoming the new Mrs. Granger-Malfoy will most likely feed the gossip rags for months to come. Merlin knows I'll be watching closely. Stay tuned for more!

Tudaloo!

Rita

Hermione's face was set in shocked surprised as Draco started guffawing and coughing a bit as some toast was sucked into his wind pipe.

"Ugh, that woman!" she ground out, obviously frustrated. "How the hell did she figure that out? There's no way she's that bright!" Hermione wrinkled her nose disgustedly even as Draco chuckled.

"Aw, wife," he teased, his eyes darkening at his new pet name for her. 'You knew exactly what we would see when we opened the paper today. I told my father that pretending you conceived after we married wasn't going to work. Merlin knows the entire wizarding community will agree with her — and they're right!' He sighed, but his eyes were still lit with mirth. "There's no reason to be ashamed. Their opinions don't matter."

"Yes, I know," she agreed as she folded the page and tossed the paper to the floor, "but one can always hope the public would butt out."

"Not when the Wizarding World's Most eligible bachelor ties the knot," Draco teased as he leaned across the small gap separating them to cup the back of her neck while drawing her in for a kiss. It was meant to be comforting, if not placating, but quickly turned heated.

"Back to bed, I think," he muttered against her lips as he stood, abruptly pulling Hermione and her half-eaten slice of toast to her feet. Her giggles never sounded so sweet.

Just as they were about to crawl back into their marriage bed, there was a heavy knock at their door. "You have some explaining to do, Draco Malfoy!" Lucius' was in an obvious rage

and Hermione looked at Draco wide-eyed.

“When did you ask Tinny to bring Cassiopeia?” he said, looking rather nervous.

“You didn’t warn him?” Hermione hissed, pushing him off her so she could don her robe. Draco followed quickly, also pulling on his house coat.

His parents could be heard through the door. “Lucius, I told you to leave them alone. They just got married yesterday,” Narcissa was saying. Her voice, however, was lovey-dovey and sing-songy. It didn’t sound like she was addressing her husband.

Draco groaned inwardly as Hermione pulled open the door of their suite.

“I want it gone!” Lucius demanded, not even bothering to greet his son and daughter-in-law. “How in the world could this possibly be happening? It took me years to get that... that... familiar abomination out of this house! She killed Kenny!” He stomped his foot and his hands were balled into fists at his side.

Hermione shot a look at Draco and mouthed, “Kenny?”

Draco nonchalantly whispered, “His favorite peacock, Dickens. He called him Kenny.”

Ahh, yes! Hermione remembered now. Draco had explained the story when he first spotted the familiar in her flat. Hermione smirked at her father-in-law’s rage even as she met Narcissa’s eyes over his shoulder. The blonde witch was on her knees in front of the gigantic cat, having the reunion of a lifetime. Beauty was butting her head into Narcissa’s chest, rubbing against her, and purring so loud it sounded like a car was idling in the hallway.

“You’re just upset because Hermione pulled one over on you, Lucius,” Narcissa berated her husband before turning back to the cat, “She’s brilliant, that girl, isn’t she Cassie? She’s going to be a hell of a match for our poor men, isn’t she?”

“Narcissa!” Lucius’ tone was as close to whining as Hermione had ever heard it. She exchanged a glance with Draco who was obviously holding back laughter. The look on Draco’s face made Hermione snort — loudly — before completely breaking into hysterical giggles, doubling at the waist.

“This is not funny!” Lucius intoned, causing everyone but himself to join in with Hermione’s laughter.

Lucius looked at his family, frustration marring his features, but after a minute or so, he smirked. “Fine, I concede,” he swiped a hand down his face, trying to control the smile as everyone continued to laugh at his expense. “A Gryffindor got the best of me — but it will *never happen again!*” This only caused the titters to grow in intensity.

He let out a roar of good-humored annoyance before demanding, “That damn cat will wear a bell, so she can’t sneak up on my birds!”

The laughter only continued.

Three weeks later, Hermione was in her office at the end of the day. It was getting dark and she could hear the low rumble of distant thunder and see the sky light with occasional flashes

of lightening. Although it had not yet started to rain, clearly a storm was coming. She contemplated dashing to the market. Maybe she could be home before the impending downpour. A few minutes later she braved the threatening conditions and left her office.

She glanced up and down the street, noticing how barren it was. No one was out. The wind was gusting, and she could smell the rain even though it wasn't falling yet. She imagined the weather contributed to the empty streets. She pulled her robes more tightly around her frame as she dashed into the corner market. She was craving her favorite potato soup and planned to make it for a simple Sunday dinner. She didn't want to have to shop on Saturday, given that she had plans in Muggle-London with her mother. Grabbing and paying for what she needed, Hermione headed back out and walked toward the Apparition point.

A few small drops of rain smacked her face, coming sideways and hitting her where her scarf wasn't protecting. The wind was cold and the rain even colder. It was only October, but there was a winter feel to the air. She pulled the scarf up, over her head and tight around her neck to fight the chill. A loud clap of thunder startled her, and she scolded herself for being so jumpy.

Suddenly, someone gripped her arm roughly. She was being spun sideways, into an alley. Instantly her heart raced, and her instincts kicked in. Her wand was tucked in the sleeve of the arm carrying the groceries. As she made to grab the wand with her other hand, the towering, dark form hustled her against a brick wall and she felt her breath escape in a gasp from the sudden impact. A husky voice sounding desperate and choked, whispered in her ear. "Princess, pet." Incapacitating fear turned into white-hot desire, followed by her throat tightening with tears. *Draco.*

"Draco, what are you —?" Her words were cut off when his mouth crashed onto hers. The bag in her hand fell to the wet ground and her arms desperately reached up and around his neck. How many times had she imagined this very scene? How many times had she wanted him to do this? To surprise her? To take her? To not take 'no' for an answer? But that was before their breakup. Before they both said too many regretful things. Before she decided that being Hermione Granger-Malfoy had been a terrible decision. She curved one hand protectively over the slight bulge of her ever-growing belly.

"Draco, no. It's over between us! No more." The words tore at her heart; they were all wrong. He was supposed to be her forever. Her hands came down to his chest and shoved, but it was like pushing against a brick wall. He didn't budge even a millimeter.

His response was a feral growl. "Yes, you can. I want you, pet. I need you. I'm starving for you." His tone softened. "I miss you, Hermione. Come home."

Her eyes dashed frantically toward the street. Her words were an urgent whisper. "No, Draco, I don't want this anymore."

His hands slipped between the gap in the front of her robes. She panted as they moved across her torso, one hand slipped up to grasp her breast, over her dress, while the other grabbed her bottom. He pulled her into him, groaning over the changes in her body.

She swallowed heavily and looked up into his pleading eyes, desperate with his need for her, clouded with the love he held for her. She felt her scarf slip to the ground but was too pre-occupied to care.

Her heart was pounding, screaming its hunger for this man. *No Hermione!* She reprimanded herself. She may want him, but she knew it would lead to more frustration and pain. She was just reaching the point where she wasn't thinking about him constantly, though the pregnancy meant he was never far from her mind. This would set her back drastically.

Sensing her hesitation, he pressed himself harder against her. The rain had started to pound the ground around them. There was an awning over their heads protecting them from the brunt of the downpour, but they were still getting wet — and it was cold. He moved her slightly to stand in a shallow alcove marking the alley entrance of a closed bakery. More shielded from the rain, she forced her eyes up into his.

“Draco, stop. We can't do this.”

Her breath hitched when his eyes glazed over; the look no longer desperate but dark, carnivorous, and Dominant. His voice was guttural, and Hermione shivered with her own desperate need for him when he all but growled, “You seem to think I'm giving you a choice, pet. You won't deny me. I won't allow it.”

Her panties were instantly wet as her secret fantasy was continuing to become real. Despite what he was doing and what he said, Hermione knew she could say no and this would all come to a stop. Draco was not a rapist. She knew she needed to end this before it went too far, but the word just wouldn't push past her lips. It was then that she made her decision.

“Draco. I said no!” She pushed against him hard and her foot smashed down on his.

“Fuck!” One of his hands grabbed her right wrist and then snaked around her left, before she pulled it away. Both wrists in his control, he whispered with an evil grin on his face, “Don't fight me. You can't win.” His eyebrow was cocked, daring her to challenge him.

Her eyes softened and grew wide with their sincerity and vulnerability. Her voice was a whisper, yet came out choked with emotion. “Oh, Draco. I don't want to fight you. I love you.” It wasn't a lie — she would always love him. They just couldn't be together. It just wasn't working. She couldn't be a Malfoy. He was the one who had made the ultimatum — marry or nothing. She had tried being married; she had tried living in that house. She just... couldn't.

His eyes immediately softened in return, all Dominance gone as he dropped her wrists and grabbed her face, kissing her with abandon.

As soon as he loosened his grip, she stamped down on his foot and shoved his unsuspecting form with all her might. He stumbled backwards, surprise on his beautiful face.

Hermione grinned without humor as she took off at an awkward run, further into the dark alley. The rain was hammering down, making her vision obscured. She could hear him coming up behind her, but there was nowhere to go. She grabbed her wand and pointed it straight ahead, “*Reducto!*” The locked, chain-link gate that was blocking her path blasted apart. She ran fast, sensing him right on her heels.

“*Arresto Momentum,*” she heard him yell from behind her. Just as he started to shout, she dodged to her left and the jinx just missed her.

She kept her pace and pointed her wand back over her shoulder as she yelled, “Colloshoo!”

She laughed maniacally when she heard him fall to the ground behind her, cursing loudly. He must have slipped out of his glued-to-the-ground shoes quickly, because she could hear the splatter of his steps once again as he started to gain on her.

Shit! The rain was coming down so hard that she was completely drenched. Her hair was sticking to her face and the weight of the water that soaked her robes was slowing her down. The alley was completely dark and, coupled with the downpour, Hermione couldn’t see more than a few feet in front of her. A bolt of lightning lit the alley with a bright flash and she noticed a door to the warehouse on her right. Desperate, she ran to it and turned the knob. Miraculously, it opened and she scurried in like the drowned rat she was before she slammed it behind her, just cutting him off. “Colloportus,” she whispered and waved her wand, locking the door.

She turned and looked around the massive, dark space. It was essentially empty and looked abandoned. She ran to the other side of the large room where she spotted another door. The sound of rain on the metal roof was deafeningly loud. She could faintly hear him yell “Alohomora!” and the door behind her open just as she slipped out through the other.

“Bollocks,” she whispered when she found herself outside in the rain again, only in a different alley. Thunder boomed, causing her to startle. Another flash of light and then another immediate crash told her the storm was right overhead.

The flashes of light guided her. There were several huge, wooden shipping crates scattered throughout the alley. She dashed behind one and hid, her heart positively racing with adrenaline from their little game. She placed her hand over her mouth as she heard him come out of the building. “Ah, pet. I know you’re out here. You’re being very naughty. Tricking me... running from me... jinxing me.”

It was very hard to hear his footsteps for the rain pounding against the crates and the ground.

“Come out, come out wherever you are,” he threatened eerily, in a sing-song voice. She had a sense he was coming around behind her, so she slowly crept forward, hoping she wasn’t making a terrible mistake. Oh, but what a mistake it turned out to be. She squealed as she turned to run when he was standing nowhere near where she had thought. He had been right in front of her.

“*Carpe retractum!*” he yelled. Instantly, Hermione felt a rope wrap around her just above the swell of her pregnancy. Slowly, she was pulled back towards the caster.

He chuckled with his victory as he teased, “Ahh, see? It was only a matter of time.” One arm came around her struggling form as his other hand grabbed her sopping-wet hair, forcefully pulling her head back.

“Draco, no. Let me go... please!” she begged, her voice desperate.

He merely looked down at her, his eyes moving from her brown pleading orbs, to her soft lips, and then down to her chest. He lifted her and pressed her back against the wet brick. “I

don't want to let you go, Hermione," he whispered, sounding somewhat broken. "I've told you over and over again, I want you to come home. I love you."

The alley was pitch black, the rain relentless. Water was dripping down her face as he held her bound form against the wall. He let her body slide down, so her feet were on the ground and then his serious expression shifted and he grinned maliciously as he gave her a taste of her own medicine. "Colloshoo," he whispered. This caused her shoes to stick to the ground and left her unable to stomp on his feet or run away without removing them.

Casting another sticking charm on her hands, he pressed them into the wall and, just like that, she was completely at his mercy. He cocked his head as though studying her before he moved his gaze down her body and then back up. He pulled her robes open in the front, and Hermione saw his eyes darken once again as they traced the outline of her breasts.

Draco swallowed hard, he was so incredibly aroused. She truly had no idea how much their little game had upped the intensity of his desire for her. She was playing along so beautifully and had even managed to jinx him. It made his victory all the more delectable. Here she was, bound to the brick wall in front of him with her eyes full of anticipation, and it had been far too long since he had possessed her last.

Her robes were open, leaving her in a soaked, grey silk maternity dress. A dress that had become completely see through and glued to her body, outlining the swell of his virility. His predatory gaze slid all the way down to her kitten heels and back up again.

He smiled with a devious glint when she spat, "Don't touch me!"

"Oh, little Princess. I'm not just going to touch you," he teased. He stepped close and placed a gentle kiss where her neck met her collarbone and proceeded to lick, lasciviously up her neck to her ear, where he whispered, "I'm going to fuck you... hard."

Hermione was putty. At this point, he could do whatever he wanted. She was so aroused she couldn't even pretend to fight him anymore. Damned her willpower to hell, she wanted him, and she wanted him now.

"What's going on over there?! Miss?! Are you alright?!"

"Shit!" Draco whispered as he immediately stepped back and released the sticking charm on her wrists and the jinx on her shoes. The binding ropes vanished with another quick flick of his wand. She pulled her robes around herself and stepped into him with the intention of hiding her face.

"I'm calling the police!" the man yelled out.

Draco pulled Hermione close and started to walk fast. "Shit," he whispered again.

"How did we end up in Muggle London?" Hermione mused as she nestled into his side, breathing in his delicious scent.

"I have no idea," he responded in frustration. As soon as they were confident they were out of site, he spun and Apparated them away.

Hermione stumbled from the unexpected side-along Apparition, but Draco's firm hold on her kept her grounded. With her hand securely grasped in his, he pulled her through the Apparition Foyer door in Malfoy Manor before he pushed her against the nearest wall, his

mouth once again claiming hers. His hands frantically pushed off her outer robe and fumbled with the zipper of her wet dress. Her hands were around his neck, desperately pulling him close. If she could crawl under his skin, she would have. Her need to consume him, and be consumed by him, was all encompassing. All her logic and well thought out reasons for staying away from him had abandoned her psyche. All she wanted was this wizard. This wizard who hadn't touched her in too long. This wizard whom she had been dreaming about, fantasizing about, and missing so much it physically hurt.

Down the hall, Lucius could hear the obvious sounds of Draco and Hermione going at it. Again. This would be the third time since their wedding just over three weeks ago that he had caught them in the actual act of fornication, or pre-fornication. Something had to be done.

He sighed and switched his trajectory of destination to include the Apparition Foyer. Lucius rounded the corner just in time to see Draco's lips trail down the bare skin of his daughter-in-law's neck as he pulled the dress down her arms. It pooled on top of her swollen belly. Just as he was about to slip her bra off, he subtly cleared his throat.

"Have you two seriously never heard of a bed? This is getting quite ridiculous, you know," he drawled in a bored sounding voice.

Hermione squealed in horrified protestation and Draco found himself pressed against his wife, hiding her from his father's view. "Father!" he exclaimed hotly, turning his head to glare at Lucius over his shoulder.

Lucius couldn't help it, he let out a snigger as he met Hermione's eyes. The poor thing was mortified. "Perhaps you should wait until you at least reach your wing, son. That way you won't be putting your wife on exposition to your father and the house elf staff," he gestured to the left of the couple, who's heads swiveled to find two house elves busily cleaning and obviously doing their best to not pay attention to what was happening.

"Hermione, maybe it is you that needs the bell? So we know which corridors to avoid when you are actively engaged?" Lucius continued mercilessly, thoroughly enjoying the shade of tomato red blossoming over her skin.

"Oh, Merlin," Hermione muttered. Knowing her cheeks had to be blazing red at this point, she buried her face in Draco's neck.

Draco, on the other hand, was exceedingly amused. "Sorry, father," he grinned still shielding Hermione's half naked body with his own. "Perhaps you would excuse us?"

"Of course," Lucius responded with mock gallantry and dipped his head, still grinning broadly. As much as he had disliked the idea of a Mudblood as a daughter-in-law, he had to admit he was growing fond of the girl. She was definitely adding to their lives.

Draco tightened his hold around her shoulders and, with a quick spin and a thunderous crack, he Apparated them to their suite.

"Oh my god," Hermione moaned as she pulled away from Draco and covered her face with her hands.

"Stop," Draco chided her as he started to laugh. "It's not that big of a deal. He honestly doesn't care. At least you still had your bra on this time — it's really no different than you swimming in a bikini in front of him."

"It wasn't what I was wearing Draco!" she hissed, pushing away from him as he guffawed louder. She turned her back on him before crossing her arms under her bust. Her shoulders started shaking and Draco's mirth left him immediately. She cried so easily these days.

"Don't be like that," he said softly, settling his hands on her upper arms. He brushed his cheek against hers as he molded his front to her back before he realized she was giggling as well. "Ha!" he choked out, breaking into chuckles once more as he pressed kisses to the sensitive spot beneath her ear.

"I think you're a bit of an exhibitionist, Mrs. Granger-Malfoy," he breathed into her ear, still chuckling. "I think you like it when my father catches us."

Hermione's giggles turned into a little moan as her head dropped to the side to give him better access to continue with his kisses and nips. "Perhaps," she murmured noncommittally, 'He is awfully easy-going about it. I somehow imagined your father being wound a bit more tightly in the propriety department.' She hummed in her throat when his hands moved to massage her breasts as his mouth met the skin between her neck and shoulder. "I'm sorry we got caught in the alley," she told him.

"Me, too," he answered before spinning her in his arms. He loved the feel of their child between them as he captured her lips, his ardor spiking once again. "We'll try again some other time."

"Yes," she agreed. 'But I don't want to pretend we've broken up again. I didn't like that role play at all,' she gasped as his hands brushed her nipples before encircling her torso, "it made my heart hurt."

"Mm," he agreed, deftly unclasping the back of her bra as she pushed her dress over her baby bump.

Her nipples were hardened peaks and he relished the feel and taste of them on his tongue. His hands tenderly rubbed up and down her arms and he could feel the goosebumps on her skin. He backed into the nearest flat surface and raised her to sit on its edge before he fell to his knees, slipping her dress down her legs and her heels off her feet. His strong hands slid her lacy thong down her trembling legs before returning to the apex of her thighs to spread her open as his mouth dived in, feasting on her delicious, sensitive folds and skin. Soft mewls escaped from her mouth as her hands moved behind her to balance on the side table he had deposited her on.

"Gods, yes," she panted with need as his skilled mouth began working her in that spot she craved the most. Her hips thrust forward of their own volition, desperate for the release of the coil that was quickly tightening within her.

Draco loved the soft sounds of desperation falling from her lips. His hands were wrapped around her thighs. He could feel her quivering with need but when her teeth started chattering, he realized her trembling might have nothing to do with desire. He caressed up her body with his mouth, making sure to kiss the swell that was his daughter, before guiding her into the bathroom.

With a flick of his wand, the shower came to life. "Get in," he demanded as he stripped wet clothing from his body. Seconds later, he stepped in behind her to once again press her up against the wall.

The steamy hot water felt marvelous as it slid down her cool, damp body, warming her to the tips of her toes. The length of Draco's body behind her made her feel alive and had every nerve ending standing to attention. Their actions had been so frantic out of the shower, that when he resumed at a lazy, seductive pace it left her feeling a bit barmy. It had simply been too long. They were foolish to abstain from sex for two weeks, agreeing that it would make their consensual non-con scene all the more intense.

He took her gently by the shoulders and turned her around to face him, dropping his lips to hers in a gentle, exploratory quest of nips and suckles. He tipped her head back to drench her hair. Still kissing her like he was making love to her mouth, he smoothly poured a handful of shampoo in her hair and started massaging it into her scalp. She groaned in appreciation of the tender massage and pressed her naked breasts and swollen belly into his torso while wrapping her arms around his neck. Draco grinned against Hermione's mouth and angled her head to rinse the soap out of the thick, tangled strands. He repeated the process with the conditioner before pouring body wash on a soft sponge.

"Draco!" Her breath hitched as her body convulsed under his ministrations. She gasped as he soaped up her breasts, teasing her over-sensitive nipples to a painful point. "Please!" She arched into him desperately, but his only response was another maddening chuckle as he spun her again. Pulling her back so her bottom was cradled against his thighs, Draco's slippery hands cupped and massaged her breasts before gliding across her baby bump and to her sex.

"Fuck!" she shouted when he parted her folds.

"Yeah, baby," he rumbled in her ear. "I love it when your language goes foul, it means you're no longer thinking." He teased her clit for too brief a moment before pushing her back into the spray to rinse her body. This time when he cupped her breast, he grasped each nipple a bit roughly between each thumb and pointer finger.

"Gah! Draco, please!" she exclaimed, her voice filled with obvious need as she thrust her bum back to rub against his reaction.

"Ah, ah, ah," he teased. 'Put your hands flat on the wall,' he ordered dominantly. She didn't think twice before she complied. She must have missed the whispered incantation, because next she knew he was setting his wand on the shelf in front of her and her hands were stuck. "Spread your legs and get up on your toes." The tone of his voice made Hermione shudder spectacularly. She complied as his hands slid down her sides, grazing the sides of her breasts before resting on each of her hips.

Draco reangled her hips to make sure they were out of the spray as not to wash away her natural lubrication and the next things she knew, he was slamming himself into her in one, brutal thrust.

"Oh, fucking Merlin!" she cried out as her eyes rolled back in her head. She strained against the spell holding her hands flat to the wall. "Oh, god. Oh, god," she muttered as he quickly pulled almost all the way out before thrusting in again, and again. In her position, she was unable to meet his thrusts, but wasn't even sure she'd want to. His cock was hitting every spot in utter perfection. Her pregnancy-sensitized pussy roared to life at his ministrations. His grip on her hips was keeping her pelvis rotated posteriorly, making sure her g-spot was receiving glorious friction. She was going to come — quickly, and *hard*.

“Draco, Draco, Draco!” she panted out, gasping and making mewling noises deep in her chest with each thrust.

“That’s it, wife,” Draco’s voice was tight with control as he continued to pound into her with a primal, possessive rhythm. She was going to go mad, surely, from the sensation alone. “Come for me, Hermione, come on.” He upped his pace, his sac hitting her clit with every hard thrust. She moaned loudly, her chin falling to her chest in between her raised and frozen arms as water trailed down her face and off the tip of her nose. Her hair was almost suffocating, but all she could concentrate on was the place they were joined and the delicious sensations he was eliciting.

She was so close, and he didn’t falter in his movement. “Now, witch! You come now!” His next thrust made her scream her release.

“Unngh! Fuuuuck, Draco!” She babbled nonsensically as he rode her through her orgasm, not pausing for even a moment. She felt her whole body go limp, even as his pace kept on, and felt like she was hanging from her wrists. Eventually he slowed until he was still behind her.

“You didn’t come?” she was confused but trembling and sated to the point that her mind was fuzzy from it.

“That’s because I’m not finished with you,” he growled. Just like that, Hermione was a ball of nerves all over again. She watched through heavy lidded eyes as he picked up his wand and released the sticking charm before gently pulling out of her and shutting off the water.

Draco used his wand to dry them both before scooping her up bridal style. He carried her to their bed before setting her down on her feet. He sat on the edge of the bed and met her eyes. His grey orbs were dark with lust and desire and it only made Hermione’s body ache for more even though she had been thoroughly satisfied only moments before.

“On your knees, witch,” he instructed heatedly. “I want your mouth on my cock.”

Compliance was a non-issue. She had dreamed about pleasuring him this way for days. She loved having this control over him. Dropping to her knees, she took his length in one hand firmly and stroking him. She looked up at him with a coy smile when he let a heavy breath of pleasure whoosh through his nose. One hand pumped him while the other cupped and stroked his balls, making him grunt.

He let her carry on thus for a moment before he tangled a hand in her hair, pulling her head up to look him in the eye. “I said put your mouth on me, wife,” he growled. “Stop teasing.”

Her eyes sparkled mischievously up at him as she slowly opened her mouth and, never taking her eyes off his, enveloped the bulbous head of his cock between her pouty, pink lips. A groan rumbled in his chest as the hand in her hair tightened and guided her forward a bit more forcefully than what was normal for him. Hermione immediately relaxed her throat, knowing he was going to make her take it all. Her gag was slight, and he held her firmly in place, all the while keeping his fiery gaze locked to hers. Just as she was starting to think about panicking for her next breath, he let her go. By releasing her hair, he indicated she was now allowed to give him pleasure at her own pace.

And she did — with enthusiasm. She gripped the base of his throbbing cock with one hand, pumping it gently as she pulled back fully to suck in a deep breath. She kept her gaze locked to his while submitting herself to take him in fully again, making him swear verbosely. Draco's fingers sought her hair again, but this time it was just to caress and guide and not to control. She tightened her lips and sucked deeply as she slowly slid back up his length, swirling her tongue heavily through his frenulum and around the hole at the top. He cursed again and involuntarily jerked his hips.

Draco didn't allow Hermione to control the situation for too long. Reaching for her, he grabbed her by both wrists before standing and pulling her up with him, practically ripping himself from her mouth. He bodily lifted her and gently tossed her back on the bed, both were breathing raggedly as he climbed on top of her. The swell of her belly was not so much as to be a huge hinderance as of yet, she was only twenty-five weeks along. He rolled her to her left side and straddled her left leg while folding her right leg up to press against her chest. He was in her before she could take a second breath and she moaned loudly as he growled. His hands came down on each side of her and his chest held her leg in position as he pistoned into her again.

Hermione arched and wiggled, meeting his thrusts as best she could while both her hands came up to frame his face and drag his mouth to hers. They kissed deeply, tongues mating the same as their lower bodies. She jerked and cried against his lips when Draco found and pinched her clit between his thumb and forefinger, rubbing it on each side until she sobbed against his mouth and came a second time.

This time, Draco joined her by pumping violently and letting her clenching muscles milk away his control. He buried his face in her neck and roared ferociously as he spilled his seed into her already crowded womb.

"Merlin, witch," he hissed as the last jets of come escaped violently from his body.

"So good," she agreed, 'but, uh. You need to get off!' she let out a breathless chuckle and pushed at him. "I don't know if that position will work much longer."

"Oops!" Draco grinned at her devilishly and slowly slid out of her and rolled to his side. He reached for her just as Hermione rolled into his outstretched arms to settle on her side and rest her face against his chest.

"Waiting that long sucked," he told her while wrapping his arm around her shoulders and tangling his fingers into her wild curls. "But I cannot deny that that was one of the most intense orgasms I've had in a while."

"Yes," she agreed. "'Absence makes the heart' and all that nonsense."

They lay quiet after that for a moment before Hermione let out a low, surprised gasp.

"What's wrong?" Draco murmured, just on the brink of dozing off.

"I felt the baby!" Her voice was full of wonder. "Draco!" she paused, and her hand moved to settle low on her stomach.

"Can I feel?" Draco's voice was full of longing.

"It might be too soon for you..." she trailed off as the feeling of butterflies in her womb continued. Quickening is what the books called it. 'Hand me your wand,' she indicated to where his wand lay on the nightstand. When he gave it to her wordlessly, she took his hand and cast a spell over the palm. "It increases your sensitivity. It still might not work, but it's worth a try?"

"Yes," he agreed, eagerly setting his palm flat to her rounded abdomen. They were quiet for quite a while before more butterflies started dancing and Draco's eyes grew wide with wonder. 'I feel it!' he exclaimed, looking down into her eyes. "That's incredible."

They grinned at each other for a moment before snuggling in again. Draco did not remove his palm from her bump. Just as he was about to fall asleep, Hermione let out a muffled oath and started to roll to her side. Draco held her tightly. "What's wrong, now?"

"I want to sleep," she muttered petulantly.

"So sleep."

"But the baby wants to eat, Draco," she whined. "I need you to feed me."

Draco snorted. "No... I think we should have dinner with my parents tonight."

He started laughing in earnest when she swatted him with a pillow.

Hermione perused the menu, trying to narrow down what she would order. Everything looked so good.

"You look beautiful as ever, kitten."

Hermione smiled up at her ex-husband as he bent forward and planted a kiss on her cheek before sliding into the booth across from her. Her forehead crinkled as her assessing gaze swept over him. "And you look tired."

Theo shrugged as he took a large swallow of water. "Late night."

"Uh huh," Hermione scolded knowingly. 'Still haven't resorted to a beater bat, I see.' She looked back at her menu as she added. "I do hope you are practicing safe sex."

Theo grinned. "Always."

Hermione had not been wrong when she had told him the witches would be all over him when news got out that he was single. The fact the paper had misconstrued everything and made it seem that he was a wronged and jilted husband had merely added to the number of witches seeking to console his breaking heart. He had been voted *Witch Weekly's Bachelor of the Year* twice since their divorce, which had been two years ago.

"Yes, well — you need to take better care of yourself," she insisted.

Theo rolled his eyes, knowing she needed to get the last word in on any topic and deciding to let her have it.

It had taken a while, more than a year to be precise, for Theo and Hermione to become friends. A mere six months after that, and they were close friends. Once Hermione had

remarried, he had moved on with his life. A life he had been very happy with. He found that bachelorhood suited him very well. Now that he had Hermione's friendship, he was truly in a good place.

Hermione was still working on mending Theo and Draco's friendship. Progress was being made. The two wizards could hold a conversation and even laugh together at a social event, but they didn't confide in each other as they used to. Still, they had come a long way and Hermione hoped that in time they would be close again.

Their conversation moved on to work and Hermione filled him in on her latest case about a herd of centaurs who were being forced to leave a forest they had inhabited for thousands of years. Muggle urban sprawl had encroached on the land and Hermione was diligently trying to get the Ministry involved. They needed to put a stop to the Muggle expansion. There were numerous ways the Ministry could achieve this; Hermione simply needed to convince them it was necessary.

Theo wasn't currently working. The library modernization had been completed over a year ago and he just hadn't found anything that interested him. He was contemplating traveling and perhaps doing some writing. He had some ideas for a novel or two. He was also intrigued by the thought of writing travel books. While there were thousands of Muggle travel books, the wizarding world selection was very scant.

"Where would you like to go first?" Hermione asked as the first taste of steak and kidney pie made its way into her mouth.

"I'm thinking South America. There are virtually no travel books what-so-ever on any territories south of Mexico."

Hermione sipped her sparkling water as she prodded not to subtly. "And would you travel alone?"

Theo took a swallow of his wine and looked up at her with a cocked brow. "Since when are you so interested in my sex life, kitten?"

Hermione rolled her eyes exaggeratedly. "I couldn't care less, other than that I would like to see you settled, Theo. It's been two years. Don't you think it's time to stop being a play-wizard and find yourself a nice girl to settle down with?"

His blue eyes met her chocolate and he smirked. "I found a nice girl once and it didn't work out so well."

"Don't give me that, Theo Nott. I might have fallen for that 'woe-is-me' line a year ago, but not now. We've both learned from our mistakes and are capable of being better spouses for it. You deserve a witch who loves you and who dotes on you."

Theo grinned roguishly. "I have witches who love me and dote on me every night, kitten." Instantly a napkin flew across the table and hit him square in the face.

"That's not what I meant, and you know it!" she scolded playfully as she held her hand out for him to give her napkin back.

Theo pretended he wasn't going to give it to her before relenting and tossing it back across the table.

Her tone became more serious as she told him words she knew he needed to hear in a soft and reassuring voice. “Theo, you won’t make the mistakes you made with me. You’ll be such a good husband and you’ll make a wonderful father.”

Theo stared into his lunch and moved a potato from one side of his plate to the other and back again. “Yeah, well. I haven’t met the right woman.”

“How would you know? You move through them so fast you probably don’t even catch their last names.”

Theo sighed heavily, knowing he wasn’t going to win this battle. He rarely won them, but this time he knew she was right. He was averaging a new witch every couple of weeks. And in truth, it was getting old. It was part of the reason he wanted to travel; he was ready to make something of his life.

“Enough about me. How are things at the Manor? Lucius still driving you crazy?”

Hermione shook her head and smiled. “That man is a piece of work. His manipulation knows no limits,” she sipped her water, “but yes, I actually like living at the Manor. Lucius and Narcissa dote on Soleil like she is the sun itself. They are quite wonderful, actually. Even Lucius. Though I’m still learning how to handle him, he and I have become quite close.”

“And Draco? How is he?”

Hermione looked up, startled by his inquiry. Theo hadn’t asked about Draco once in the past two years even though Draco had asked about Theo plenty times.

“He’s... he’s good, Theo. He misses your friendship.”

Theo looked at her questioningly. “Hmm, I doubt that.”

Hermione sighed. “You two were best friends most of your lives. Of course, he misses you!”

After a beat, Theo added, barely above a whisper, “Well, sometimes I miss him, too.”

Hermione smiled warmly at Theo’s confession. “Perhaps... we could have dinner. The three of us. Or you could bring a date. You know... someone really beautiful. You can make both of us jealous.”

Theo grinned playfully. “Hmm, I must admit. That idea has some appeal.”

Forty-five minutes later, Theo paid the check and they were saying their goodbyes with promises to get together in another month or so.

When Hermione stood, Theo’s eyes immediately gravitated to her protruding belly. “Kitten? You’re pregnant?”

Hermione shrugged, “So it seems. Six months along now.”

A genuine smile crept across his face. “Good for you.” He stepped towards her and pulled her into a hug. ‘You’re where you’re supposed to be, you know,’ he whispered. “Married to Draco, living in Malfoy Manor, and having little platinum blond babies with riotous curls.”

When he pulled back from her, her eyes glistened. “You know I love you, Theo Nott.”

"Yeah, I know," he teased with a smile, causing her to laugh. It had become their thing. Her saying she loved him and him not saying it back, even though they both knew he loved her to the ends of the earth and back. There was no question they would be friends forever.

As Hermione left the restaurant, she thought back on the conversation she had with Lucius after dinner the night before. He had been in his study, clearing away Soleil's toys and books with a wave of his wand.

"Since when do you allow your granddaughter entrance into your study, Lucius?" Hermione had teased.

"Well, you were gone, Narcissa was at her garden luncheon at the Parkinson's, Draco was at work... was I supposed to just leave her to the elves?"

Hermione bit back her smile. "Well, thank goodness you were here and generous with your private space and your time. The horrors of being stuck with Janky or Tinny, who absolutely spoil her rotten." She no longer held back her giggle as she teased.

"Yes, well. My point precisely. They will ruin her by spoiling her to no end. There must be limits." He added with a stern glare.

Hermione wasn't fooled, especially when she saw the nonchalant flick of his wand that caused his favorite atlas that he never let Draco play with when he was young — despite numerous temper tantrums — float back to its glass case. The atlas was truly spectacular. When a page was turned, the reader was pulled, as though into a pensieve, and fully immersed in the city or country or landscape — whatever was on the page. Soleil, despite only being a year and seven months old, was completely enthralled with the magical book and Lucius indulged her like no other.

Hermione sat on the leather sofa and watched her father-in-law as he sat down at his desk, going through some papers Draco had brought him to look over.

"I'm rather surprised, Lucius."

"Why is that?" He asked, without looking up at her.

"Well, another Malfoy granddaughter will arrive in about three and half months and you have not once demanded she be named Daffodil."

Lucius peeked up at her, over the rim of his readers before pulling them off completely. "And why, my dear, would I demand such a dreadful name for my granddaughter?"

Hermione's jaw fell. "What do you mean? You loved that name! You practically insisted on pain of endless nagging that Soleil be given that name instead."

"Oh, Hermione. Do keep up. That was a ploy. I wanted you and Draco to move into the Manor. I needed you to make that decision. So, I made two requests. I knew that you would never deny me both of them, not when Cissy and I had rescued you from a scandal of epic proportions. So, I merely needed to make the one I really wanted to be the lesser of two evils. Hence, the dreadful name Daffodil was promoted. As if I would ever want a granddaughter to be called such a thing. I'd sooner declare myself a Hufflepuff."

Hermione sat stunned. "You... sneaky... devil."

He looked up at her and pointed at his chest. "Slytherin." His lip quirked at the sight of her sudden outrage. "Besides, you love it here. It was the right decision and you know it."

Hermione worked at her office until just after six. Where had the time gone? When she arrived home ten minutes later, Draco greeted her with a soft kiss that promised much more when the opportunity presented itself. "Where is Soleil?" she asked as their lips parted.

"She's in the rose garden with Father and Mother. Belby is clearing out the garden gnomes and Soleil is trying to save them." Draco scratched his head. "Lord help us all when that child gets sorted into Gryffindor."

Hermione laughed, imagining Lucius' face.

As Hermione and Draco approached, Soleil raced towards them as fast as her wobbly little legs could move her. The child fell all the time, but every morning Janky placed a Cushioning Charm on her knees, elbows, hips, and head. She made it without falling and Hermione scooped her up into her arms, peppering her cheeks with kisses. As soon as she had her fill of Hermione, she reached out to Draco. "Da-da."

Hermione smirked as she handed the child over. "Such a daddy's girl. Honestly."

Draco held his daughter tight, kissing her forehead and then tickled her belly causing her to fall into peals of laughter. Hermione spotted the table that was set in the garden for them to dine outside. As they took their seats, Hermione glanced around the table. Warmth and happiness crept through her as she looked at her family.

It was hard to believe that she was a Malfoy.

It was even harder to believe she was happy as a Malfoy.

Lucius and Narcissa had welcomed her with open arms into their fold. They treated her with respect and kindness and Hermione could even say they loved her — she had certainly grown to love them.

The center of her universe sat next to her, however. While Soleil was the sun the entire family gravitated around — and Hermione loved her so much she could barely breathe — Draco was Hermione's very own gravity. He was her rock. Her lover. Her best friend. And yes, at least once or twice a week, he was her Dominant as well. She never knew such happiness could exist. Her life with Theo was so foreign to her now, and he had been right; she was exactly where she was supposed to be.

Married to Draco.

Living in Malfoy Manor.

Having little platinum blonde babies with riotous curls.

Carrying another Malfoy girl.

A smile crept over her mouth as it hit her. She looked at her father-in-law, finding her mind made up. It would serve him right. Tapping her glass to get everyone's attention, Hermione beamed as she looked them each in the eye and then at Lucius. "I've settled on a name."

Narcissa's eyebrows rose. "Finally! Tell us!" She implored with a radiating smile.

Draco looked at Hermione curiously, just the night before she had been nowhere near making a decision.

"I feel I was hasty before. After all, it really is such a sweet name, I shouldn't have been so dismissive of something her Grandfather felt so strongly about." She lifted her glass to Lucius. "Her name will be... Daffodil."

Draco simply shrugged. "Whatever you want, love," his focus on Soleil, his hands staying close to the toddler as she started to move away from him.

Narcissa seemed to take it in stride. "Well, it is a very pretty name. We'll plant a garden full of them," she added as Soleil crawled from Draco's lap to hers.

Lucius, on the other hand, was looking at Hermione in a whole new light. When she pointed at her chest and mouthed, "Gryffindor," his face turned a light pink. She gloated internally at her victory.

Lifting his glass, Lucius actually smiled at her for the first time; a big toothy grin, his eyes sparkling with mirth. "Ahh, let the games begin."

***** *Mischief Managed* *****